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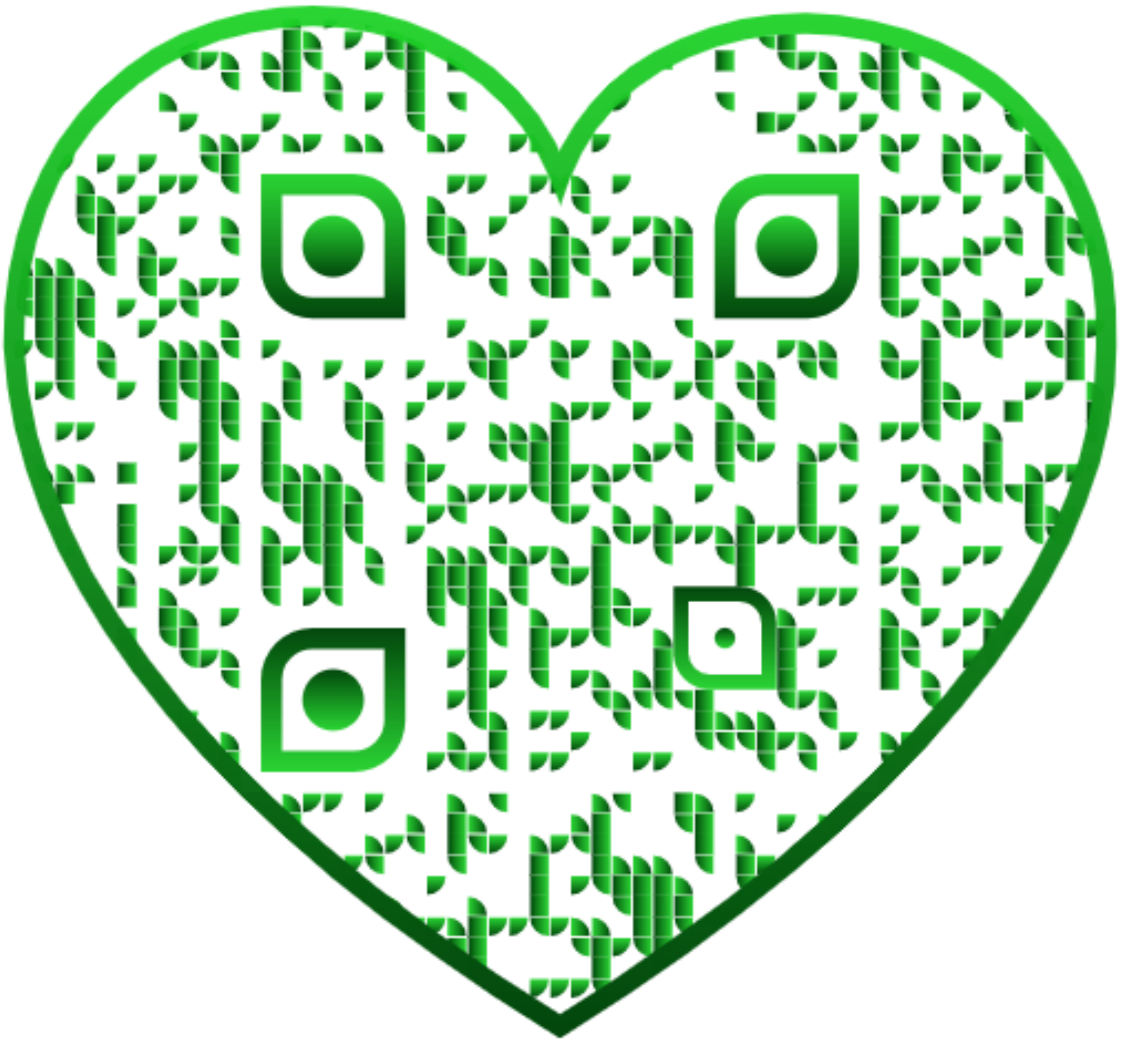

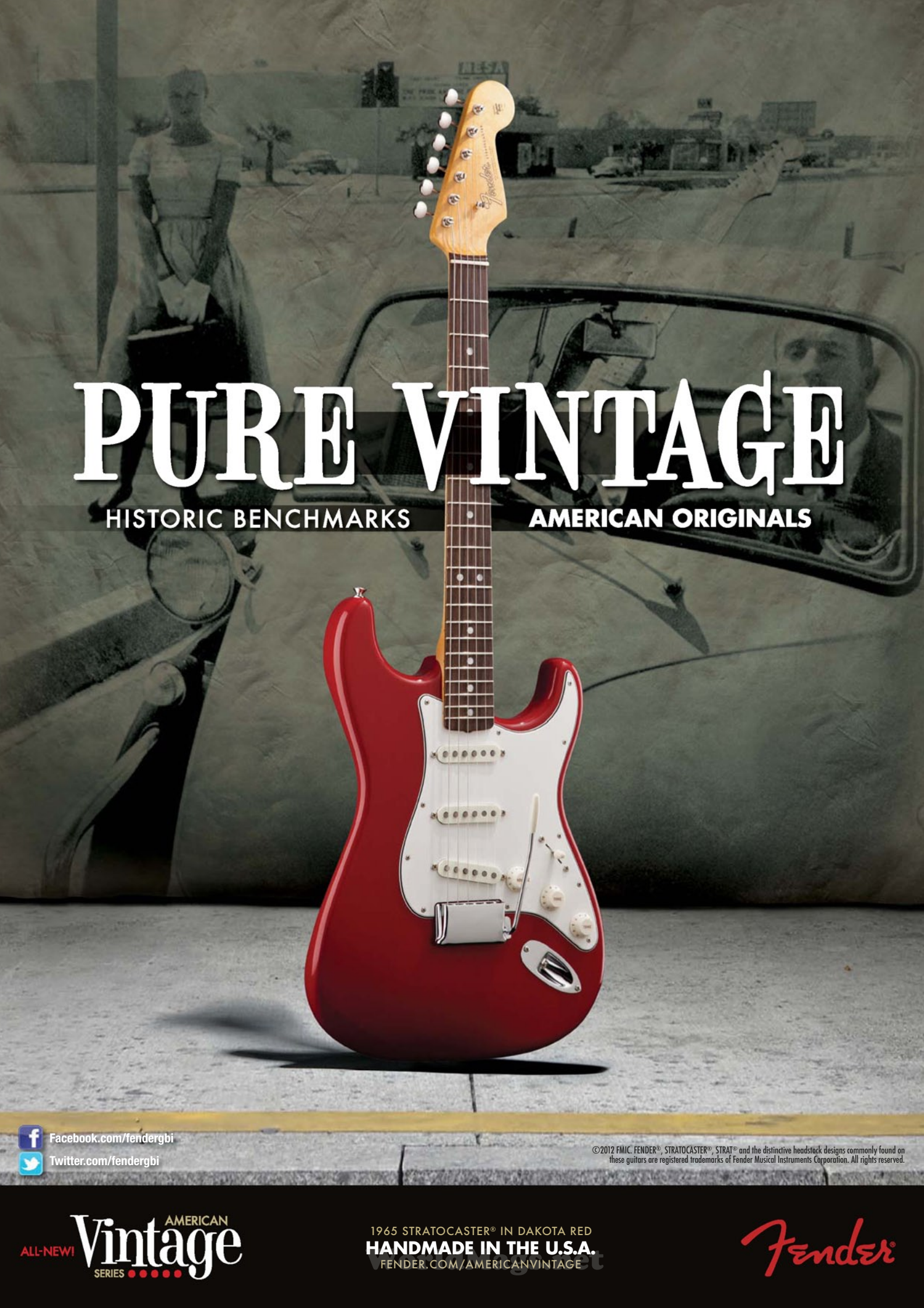
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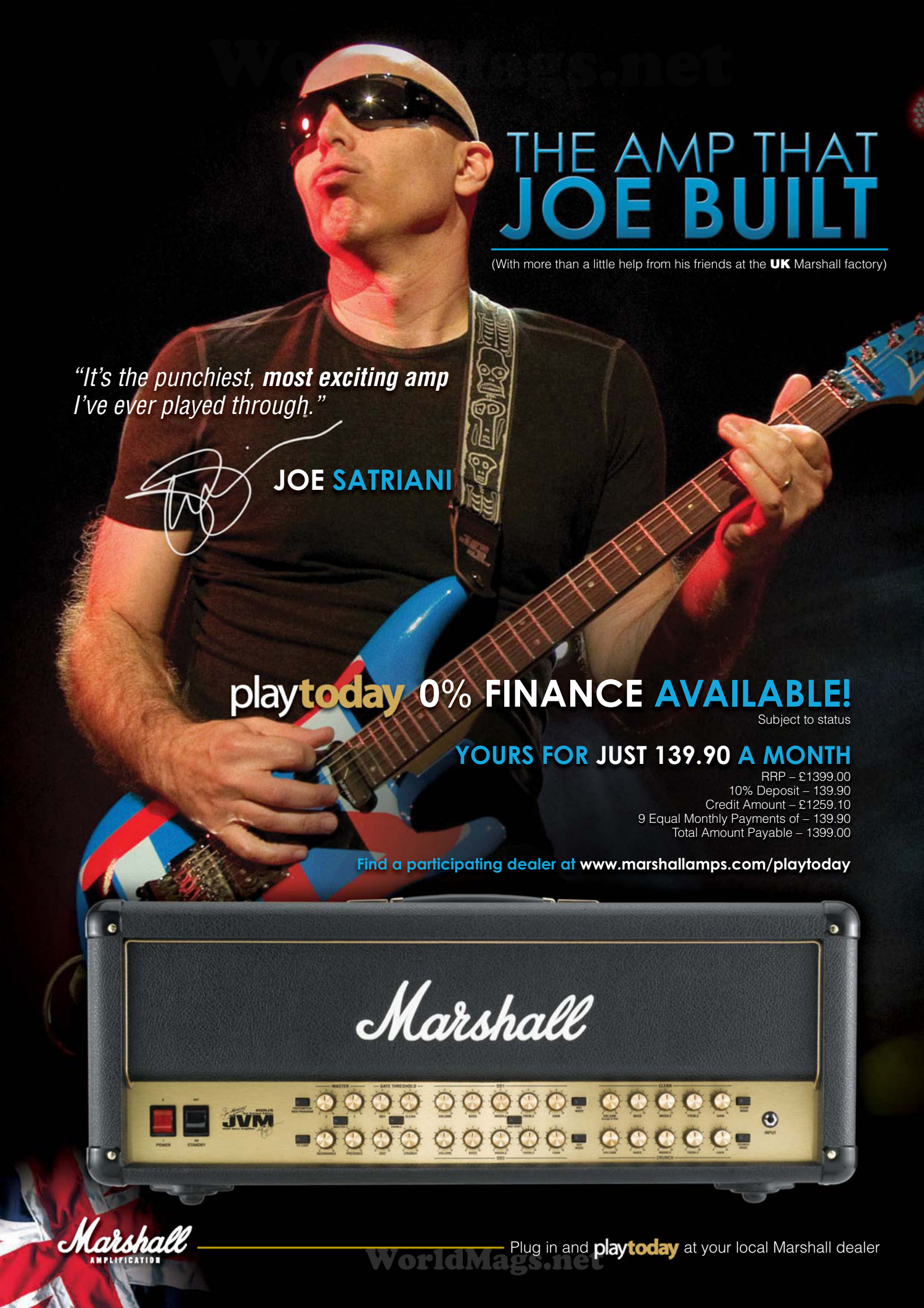

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Electric Guitars

8030 - 1963 Gibson ES175 Jazz Guitar, Sunburst
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
10066 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10055 - Brian May Red Special, Metal May
7028 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10065 - Brian May Red Special, Baby Blue
10061 - Brian May Red Special, Black
10063 - Brian May Red Special, Gold
10064 - Brian May Red Special, Green
10059 - Brian May Red Special, Honey Sunburst
10058 - Brian May Red Special, Natural
10057 - Brian May Red Special, Sunburst
10062 - Brian May Red Special, White
10060 - Brian May Red Special, Windermere Blue
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10231 - Brooks Custom Steve, Lukather Clone
9767 - Cort G260 Electric Guitar
10224 - Cort M600 AVD Antique Violin Dark
10220 - Cort Sunset I in Black
10223 - Cort X6 S-M BK Electric Guitar in Black
7793 - DBZ Barchetta Eminent FR Absinthe
7785 - DBZ Barchetta ST, Aubergine
7789 - DBZ Barchetta ST FR, Cobalt Blue
7814 - DBZ Crucifixion Electric Guitar
7810 - DBZ Dark Angel Electric Guitar
7812 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Devil
7811 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Preacher
7800 - DBZ Bolero AB, Solid Wine Red
7796 - DBZ Bolero FM, Trans Wine
7794 - DBZ Bolero ST, Black
7837 - DBZ Venom, Dark Blue Metallic
9770 - Dean Evo, Pre-Owned
5043 - Duesenberg 49er Cow Limited Edition
5040 - Duesenberg Rocket II in Black & White
10233 - ESP LTD MH50, Black, Pre-Owned
9769 - Encore Electric Guitar, Black
5205 - Epiphone Broadway Jazz Semi, Natural
8220 - Epiphone ES339 Semi Hollowbody, Ebony
9155 - Epiphone ES339, Natural
8528 - Epiphone ES339 Ultra, Vintage Sunburst
5432 - Epiphone G310 SG Shape, White
9631 - Epiphone Joe Pass Emperor II, Natural
9695 - Epiphone Les Paul Special II Cherryburst
9905 - Epiphone LP Stan Plustop Pro, Cherry S/B
10351 - Epiphone LP Stand. Plustop Pro, Wine Red
8365 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard in Gold
10352 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard, Ebony
10217 - Epiphone Les Paul Studio, Sunburst, S/H
9604 - Epiphone Les Paul Ultra III Alpine White
8096 - Epiphone Ltd Ed Flying V, Antique White
8165 - Epiphone Ltd Ed 1961 SG, Alpine White
9666 - Epiphone Phrophecy LP Custom Plus GX
8101 - Epiphone by Gibson, Pre-Owned
4231 - Fender Am Special Strat, Candy Apple Red
9074 - Fender American Special Strat, Sunburst
9914 - Fender Am. Special Tele, Vintage Blonde
9348 - Fender American Stan. Hand Stained Strat
10199 - Fender Am Stand. Strat LH, Sburst
9910 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Mystic Blue
8342 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Sienna Sburst
9134 - Fender American Stratocaster Daphne Blue
9023 - Fender American Vintage '70s Strat Reissue, Nat
9287 - Fender Blacktop Stratocaster HH, Black
10072 - Fender Classic Player Baja Telecaster, Blonde
9261 - Fender C. Player Jaguar Spec HH, White
9559 - Fender Custom Shop 1960 Relic Strat, GR
7112 - Fender Deluxe Lonestar Strat, Sunburst
10163 - Fender FSR 72 Telecaster Deluxe, Aqua Flake
10198 - Fender FSR Am Stan. Strat, LH, Sunburst
9085 - Fender FSR Strat HSS TBX Amber Burst
10218 - Fender Japanese Strat, CAR, Pre-Owned
4634 - Fender Jim Root Signature Strat, Black
9775 - Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar, Metallic KO
10164 - Fender Kurt Cobain Mustang, Sonic Blue
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9945 - Fender Modern Player Strat HSS, O. White
8224 - Fender Modern Player Telecaster, Honey Burst
8286 - Fender Modern Player Tele Thinline Delux
7784 - Fender Mustang Pawn Shop Special, Red
9089 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Black
9090 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Blonde
10149 - Fender Pink Paisley Telecaster, Used
5287 - Fender Road Worn 50s Strat in Black
8290 - Fender Road Worn 60's Strat, Sunburst
4229 - Fender Road Worn Player Strat, Sunburst
4232 - Fender Road Worn Player Tele, Black
9449 - Fender Select Tele USA Violin Burst
10101 - Fender Standard Strat, CAR, Secondhand
7954 - Fender Standard Strat, Copper Met Burst
4560 - Fender Standard Telecaster, Black
4748 - Fender Standard Tele, Brown Sunburst
10090 - Fender Telebration Mahogany Tele, Sburst
9911 - Fender USA 75 Telebration, Natural
9507 - Fender USA Hardtail Stratocaster 1977
8285 - Fret King Jerry Donahue, Natural
9137 - G&L ASAT Classic Bluesboy Semi, Natural
9140 - G&L ASAT Classic in Walnut
9136 - G&L Legacy in Black
9135 - G&L S500 in Blueburst
9150 - Gibson ES137 Custom, Triburst
8029 - Gibson ES175 1956 Original
9277 - Gibson ES330 VOS, Vintage Sunburst
10146 - Gibson ES335 Dot Plain Gloss, Sunburst

Electric Guitars

10273 - Gibson ES339 Antique Sunburst
9840 - Gibson Lee Roy Parnell Goldtop
8376 - Gibson Les Paul Classic 60s Trans Ebony
5317 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Alpine White
7919 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Wine Red
10197 - Gibson Les Paul Signature T, Trans Ebony
9444 - Gibson Les Paul Standard 2012 Goldtop
10116 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Prem. Tea Burst
10117 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Premi. Trans Amber
10144 - Gibson LP St Premium Plus, Desert Burst
10322 - Gibson Les Paul Stand., Heritage Cherry
9341 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Radiant Red
5090 - Gibson Les Paul Studio Lefty, Wine Red
9557 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10281 - Gibson Les Paul Trad., Caramel Burst
8202 - Gibson Nighthawk. Pelham Blue
5594 - Gibson SG Special Electric Guitar in White
10350 - Gibson SG Special Faded Cherry
10268 - Gretsch G5422TDCG Hollow Body ,White
9771 - Ibanez S470DXQM
9764 - Italia Electric Guitar, Pre-Owned
9161 - Jackson RR5 Japanese Ivory Pinstripe
4992 - Jackson JS30 Randy Rhoads, Black
4150 - Jackson SL3MG Soloist, Natural
9669 - Jackson Super Light Soloist SLSXMG GMG
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8051 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Black
8052 - Lodestone Electric Artist in Sunburst
8048 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Honey
8049 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Red
8059 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Chignal Blue
8065 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Rodings White
8058 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Tobacco Sburst
8066 - Lodestone Electric Pro S in Waltham Black
8055 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Chignal Blue
8056 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Rodings White
8053 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Roxwell Red
8057 - Lodestone Electric Pro, St James Silver
8054 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Tobacco Sunburst
8072 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, T. Sburst
8070 - Lodestone Electric Standard Trans Black
8071 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, White
8069 - Lodestone Electric Standard in White
8085 - Lodestone Pulse in Burr Maple Honeyburst
8086 - Lodestone Pulse, Matt Black
8084 - Lodestone Pulse in Metallic Gold
8087 - Lodestone Pulse, Tobacco Sunburst
7091 - MusicMan Luke HSS, Pearl Blue
4720 - MusicMan Silhouette Special, Candy Red
0000 - PRS - 12 Models in stock now
6123 - Patrick Eggle Double Cutaway in Blue
6121 - Patrick Eggle RSG Electric Guitar, Amber
9478 - Peavey AT200 Antares AutoTune Guitar
9450 - Peavey EVH Wolfgang USA-Made Goldtop
9001 - Peavey Rockmaster Captain America
9300 - Peerless Martin Taylor Virtuoso
4268 - Rickenbacker 330 12 String Semi, Jetglo
6951 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Fireglo
6952 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Jetglo
4270 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Mapleglo
10165 - Road Worn Player Tele, Candy Apple Red
8992 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Black
8993 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Sunburst
9857 - Roland G5A Strat Candy Apple Red
8990 - Roland GC1 Black GK-Ready Stratocaster
8991 - Roland GC1 Sunburst GK-Ready Strat
0000 - Squier - 6 models in stock now
0000 - Stagg - 3 models in stock now
9273 - Steinberger Spirit GT Pro
10131 - Traveller Speedster, Blue, Pre-Owned
9079 - Ventures VM100SB Bob Bogle Sig, Sunburst
9078 - Ventures VM65MBL Electric Guitar, Blue
4256 - Vintage AV2, Sunburst
9420 - Vox Apache I
9652 - Warwick Electric Guitar Accessory Pack
6982 - Washburn USADD70 Maya Dan Donegan, Grey
4757 - Washburn N1 Vintage Nuno Bettencourt Nat
7074 - Washburn SI61 Obey Scott Ian Sig, Black
6991 - Washburn USA Custom WI556, Metallic Red
6997 - Washburn V200 ProE in Black
7005 - Washburn WI100, Gunmetal Grey
7002 - Washburn WI100, Red
7009 - Washburn WI15 Idol Standard ,Black
8412 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Black
8411 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Red
7356 - Washburn WI420KB Idol, Black
8409 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Elect Flame Honey
8408 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Tobacco Sunburst
8406 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric, Black
8405 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric in White
6988 - Washburn WI50 in Black
6989 - Washburn WI50 Pro-E, Black
8404 - Washburn WI-63 SF Donegan Sig, Black
6995 - Washburn WV40VASIK Scott Ian Blood Splat
6996 - Washburn WV66ANC, Nick Catanese, Black
6898 - Washburn Wi14 Idol in Metallic Blue
6899 - Washburn Wi14 Idol in Wine Red
8230 - Washburn X10 Bass Guitar, Black
6895 - Washburn X100 in Metallic Grey
6900 - Washburn X200 Pro in Trans Black
6425 - Westcoast ST Junior in Black & Sunburst
6449 - Westcoast ST1 in Ivory, Red & Natural
8416 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Red Metallic
8414 - Yamaha Pacifica 012, Dark Blue Metallic
10234 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Black
8121 - Yamaha Pacifica 311H, Vintage White
8184 - Yamaha Pacifica 510V , Candy Apple Red
10319 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 VHFM
8124 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 Root Beer

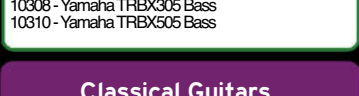
Acoustic & Electro Acoustics

8033 - Breedlove AD25/SM
8035 - Breedlove AJ250/SF Plus Electro Acoustic
10296 - Breedlove Atlas Solo Series C350/CR
10284 - Breedlove Cascade C25/CRE Electro
10285 - Breedlove Cascade OM/CRe S Cutaway
10287 - Breedlove Passport C250/COe Electro
10288 - Breedlove Passport D/MMe Electro
10289 - Breedlove Passport D250SMe Electro
10299 - Breedlove Passport PLUS D/CME Electro
10292 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250/SBe Elect
7979 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250SFE
4282 - Breedlove Passport + D/SFE Elec Sunburst
10301 - Breedlove Passport Plus D250/SB Electro
10300 - Breedlove Passport Plus OM/CMe HH
10294 - Breedlove Retro D/ERe with LR Baggs
10295 - Breedlove Retro OM/ER Orchestra Electro
10298 - Breedlove Revival OM/SMe Top Burst
4283 - Breedlove Solo C35/Sme Electro, Natural
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10219 - Cort NDX50 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10221 - Cort SFX-E NS Electro, Natural Satin
10125 - DRL 008 8 String Electro Acoustic Guitar
10124 - DRL CT09 Thinline Electro Acoustic
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
8905 - Eko Ranger Vintage 12 String w/Fishman
9206 - Epiphone EJ200CE, Natural
5157 - Epiphone EJ200CE Jumbo Vintage SunB.
9542 - Faith FMETB Mercury Electro Parlour
9104 - Faith Saturn Cutaway High Gloss FSCEHG
8300 - Faith FECS Electro Acoustic Guitar
10320 - Fender CD60CE Mahogany
7881 - Fender Kingman SCE, Dreadnought, Nat
6929 - Fender Stratacoustic, Electro, Black
10194 - Fender T-Bucket 300CE, Amber
6930 - Fender Telecoustic, Electro, Black
10243 - Fender Tim Armstrong Deluxe
10106 - Fylde Alchemist Electro Acoustic
7867 - Gibson J200 Standard Electro in Natural
7032 - Gibson J200 Standard Jumbo Guitar
8241 - Gibson J200 Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10150 - Gibson J35 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10143 - Gibson LG2 American Eagle
10147 - Gibson SJ100 Modern Classic V.Sunburst
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
4554 - Jimmy Moon PF0003 Electro, Pau Ferro
6948 - Jimmy Moon RD3, Electro, Natural
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
7302 - LAG T66ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electro
7972 - LAG T200ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electric
5403 - Levin LD60CE, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
9243 - James Neligan NA72CBB Electro Acoustic
0000 - Levin - 5 models in stock now
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
6404 - Northwood R70 00 14fret Electro, Natural
4400 - Northwood R80, 000V Electro, Natural
6403 - Northwood R80, 0M Electro, Natural
9841 - Ovation Adamas 1581-7 Electro Acoustic
5093 - Ovation CDX24 Electro Acoustic in Natural
10033 - Ovation Celebrity CC44S AB, Autumn
10031 - Ovation Pro Elite 2078AX
10032 - Ovation Pro Elite TX 1868TX Super
10151 - Ovation Pro Speciality 1773AX-4 Natural,
9299 - Peerless Martin Taylor Maestro
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10038 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
9820 - Rainsong CO-DR1000N2
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9814 - Rainsong DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10097 - Rainsong H-DR1100N2
10100 - Rainsong H-OM1000N2
10098 - Rainsong H-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10084 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Blue
10086 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Green
10085 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Pewter
10087 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Red
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
10091 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Blue
10092 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Green
10093 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Pewter
10089 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Red
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Std
9823 - Rainsong S-OM1000N2 OM Studio Electro
9822 - Rainsong S-WS1000N2 WS Studio Electro
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
9828 - RainSong Shorty Fine Texture SFT Model
7974 - Rainsong WS1000 Graphite Guitar
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5256 - Satori YD28EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5252 - Satori YD28HEQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
9536 - Sigma 000MC 15E Electro Acoustic Guitar
10303 - Takamine EG340SC, Pre-Owned
0000 - Tanglewood - 17 models in stock now
10118 - Terry Pack PLSR Parlour w/Pre-Amp
9615 - Terry Pack SJRS Small Jumbo LR Baggs M1A
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
9561 - Vintage VEC1400 Electro Acoustic
9535 - Walden CG570CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
8307 - Westcoast SW201BK -VT Acoustic Guitar
8305 - Westcoast SW201RDS VT Electro Acoustic
8306 - Westcoast SW201VT Acoustic Guitar
6960 - Yamaha CPX500 Electro in Red
9190 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Dusk Sun Red
8020 - Yamaha CPX700, Tinted Finish
9191 - Yamaha FGX730SC Electro Acoustic, Nat.
9192 - Yamaha FJX730SC Electro Acoustic, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic in Nat.
8141 - Yamaha SLG110S Silent Steel String

Bass Guitars

8687 - Breedlove Passport Plus B350/CB4
10297 - Breedlove Solo BJ350/CMe4 Fretless Bass
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
10108 - Cort A4 4 String Bass Guitar, Natural
10107 - Cort A4 Custom Z 4 String Bass Guitar
10109 - Cort A5 5 String Bass, Open Pore Natural
10105 - Cort A5 OPBC Bass Guitar
10110 - Cort B5 5 String Bass Guitar, OPN
10213 - Cort GB75WBL 5 String Bass, White Blonde
10242 - ESP LTD B204 SM, Natural, Pre-Owned
4882 - Fender USA 62 Vintage Precision Sunburst
10166 - Fender 75 Jazz Bass in Natural
9083 - Fender Am Special Jazz Bass, Sunburst
9353 - Fender Am St Hand Stained Ash Jazz Bass
9231 - Fender Am Standard Jazz Bass, Sunburst
7943 - Fender Am Stan Precision Bass, Sunburst
9727 - Fender FSR Precision, Sea Foam Metallic
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9367 - Fender Select Jazz Bass, Amber Burst
9284 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Arctic White
8287 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Brown S.burst
9909 - Fender Standard P Bass, Lake Placid Blue
10113 - G & L M2000 4 String Bass Guitar, Honeyburst
10112 - G & L M2500 5 String Bass, Honeyburst
9703 - G & L Tribute Series JB2, Natural
9138 - G&L L2000 Tribute Bass, 3-Tone Sunburst
9702 - G&L L2500 5 String Bass, Walnut
9593 - Gibson Firebird Studio Reverse 70s Bass
9575 - Gibson Grabber 3 70s Tribute Honeyburst
10074 - Gretsch G6073 Electrotone Bass, Burgundy
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8073 - Lodestone Primal Artist
8075 - Lodestone Primal Instinct J Bass, Green
8079 - Lodestone Primal Instinct P Bass, Green
8080 - Lodestone Primal Instinct Pbass Sunburst
8081 - Lodestone Primal Pro in Chignal Blue
8082 - Lodestone Primal Pro 4, Tobacco Sunburst
8174 - Lodestone Primal Pro 5, Chignal Blue
4179 - Marleaux Consat Custom 5, Satin Black
10279 - Marleaux Consat Sig 4 String Bolt On
5713 - Marleaux M Bass Custom 5, Maple & Walnut
10278 - Marleaux Votan XS Deluxe, Black
10216 - MusicMan Sterling 4, Blue, Pre-Owned
4703 - MusicMan Stingray 2EQ, Blue Pearl
4781 - MusicMan Stingray 3EQ, True Gold
4920 - MusicMan Stingray 5, Black
8997 - Musicman Sterling SB14 Bass, Sunburst
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
9002 - Overwater Aspiration Deluxe Bass, Black
8435 - Overwater Aspiration Std 4, Black Cherry
7849 - Overwater Contemporary Jazz, Trans Blue
9009 - Overwater Contemporary 5-String Bass
9867 - Overwater Inspiration Jazz PJ 4 String
10102 - Overwater J Series Deluxe 4, Natural
7259 - Overwater Perception Std 5, Bubinga
10152 - Overwater Progress Deluxe, Pre-Owned
9418 - Rickenbacker Bass, Jetglo Rick Kemp
5121 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black
7204 - Squier Classic Vibe Precision 50s Blonde
9072 - Squier Vintage Modified 70's Jazz, Nat
9517 - Squier Vintage Modified Tele Bass, Black
9704 - Stagg BC300 Lefthanded 4 String, Nat
4417 - Steinberger Spirit XT2 4 String Bass
9428 - Tobias Toby Standard IV Bass Guitar, White
9653 - Warwick Bass Guitar Accessory Gig Pack
6447 - Westcoast BG2, Natural or Trans Red
6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
6445 - Westcoast BG5 Fretless, Natural
6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber
8438 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Black
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red
10120 - Yamaha BB1024X 4 String, Caramel Brown
4649 - Yamaha BB2024X, Vintage White
9350 - Yamaha BB424 Bass Guitar in Black
9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass Guitar, Black
9352 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass, Sunburst
9000 - Yamaha RBX170
10314 - Yamaha RBX170EW Bass
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass
4331 - Yamaha TRB1004J, Trans Black
10307 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass
10308 - Yamaha TRBX305 Bass
10310 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Classical Guitars



0000 - Azahar - 6 models in stock now
10290 - Breedlove Passport N250/COe Electro
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 6 models in stock now
9482 - Ovation 1616 Classical Guitar, Pre-Owned
0000- Raimundo - 4 models in stock now
0000 - Ramirez - 10 models in stock now
5828 - Roberto - 3 models in stock now
5481 - Strunal Electro Classical Guitar
9404 - Takamine G344RC Electro, Wine Red
0000 - Tanglewood - 4 models in stock now
8351 - Westcoast - 5 models in stock now
10323 - Yamaha CGX102 Guitar
10321 - Yamaha NTX700 Guitar

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For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

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Guitar & Bass

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Subscriptions & Back Issues **Guitar & Bass Magazine**
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Tel: **Call Toll Free 800 428 3003 (US)**
Tel **+44 (0) 1795 414 781 (Rest of World)**
Email **guitarandbass@servicehelpline.co.uk**
Price (12 issues) **£51 (UK), £64 (Europe/Republic Of Ireland), $99 (USA), £72 (Rest of World)**
See page 104 for subscription details

Printed by Benham Goodhead Print
Tel +44 (0) 1869 363 333

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd, The Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street London SE1 0SU** Tel **+44 (0) 203 148 3000**

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Time to unleash the beast within...

If you've ever uttered the phrase 'There's just something about this guitar...' in a positive way, then you'll understand the appeal of this month's cover story. Some guitars have a mystique about them, and The Beast Gibson Les Paul has that kind of allure in spades. In this issue we profile both the guitar and its owner Bernie Marsden, investigate the stories behind it, and find out just what's so special about this one instrument that Gibson has gone to the trouble of producing a replica. All in all, there are some cracking tales to be told.

Elsewhere in the issue we have a stellar review list that includes new goodies from Fender, Blackstar, Orange and Peavey, to name but four. There's also much guitar-based wit to be had from interviews with top players such as Darrel Higham, Martin Simpson and Norman Watt-Roy – and, as always, vintage fans can delve deep into a Private Collection, as well as gain some sage investment advice from Sid Bishop. As the nights draw in and the temperature begins to drop, we hope that spending some quality time with this issue – and your guitar – keeps your mind full of happy thoughts...

John

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Reverberations

Write to *Guitar & Bass*, Anthem Publishing, Station House, Station Approach, off North Street, Carshalton, SM5 2HW or e-mail us: guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com
Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

STAR LETTER

NEXT BEST THING

I've come to realise that the heart of many a guitarist, myself included, is fickle. We love our gear, would probably grab it from a burning building (as did BB King), and have likely named our favourite stringed things... but how quickly affections change!

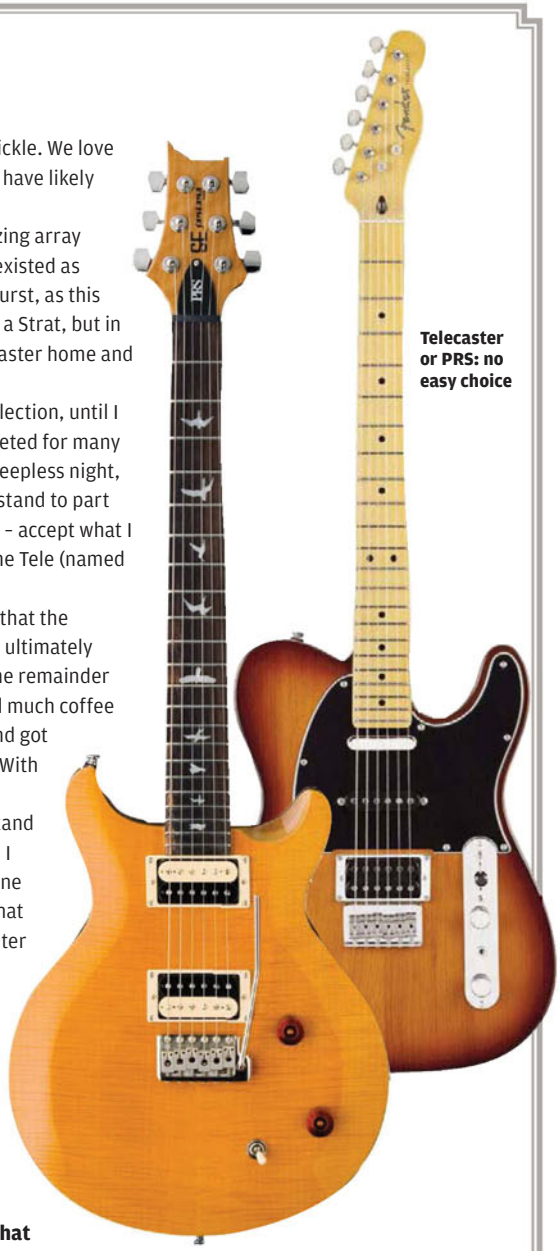
My story starts with the March 2013 issue of *Guitar & Bass*, which featured the amazing array of Telecasters available. When I saw the Nashville (with three pickups, which I'd never knew existed as an option), I was on the hunt. I eventually decided on a Fender Modern Player Plus in honeyburst, as this model had three pickups with a coil-split bridge humbucker. This guitar had the versatility of a Strat, but in the Tele body I loved! After 15 emails, and three weeks of waiting, I finally took my new Telecaster home and was instantly smitten.

I had no thoughts of purchasing more guitars any time soon. I was happy with my little collection, until I picked up the mail one day and saw an ad that showed a PRS Santana model (which I had coveted for many years) on sale at my local dealer for 30 per cent off! Oh my, what I went through – a mostly sleepless night, with many variations of 'How do I keep what I have and buy another?' along with 'What can I stand to part with as trade?' and so on. Finally, I gave in to the reality that financially I had but two options – accept what I had and let the PRS go gracefully into the night, or buck-up and return my new-found love, the Tele (named 'Claudia', if you were wondering).

It must be stated here that my wife, who normally pays little attention to guitars, realised that the particular instrument I was pining over was the one that I had been trying to save up for. She ultimately encouraged me that she would be fine with the idea of my returning the Tele and financing the remainder of the balance toward the PRS, which was a lift to my spirits! So, next day, heavy hearted and much coffee later, I had to break up with Claudia... I put her in the case for the fateful trip to the dealer, and got my refund. She had been a bright spot in my life for weeks, but just as quickly she was gone. With the refund completed, I placed an order for the PRS Santana model, and left the shop.

I knew deep down that I had made the right choice: it hurts to have an empty stand where once my lovely Telecaster had been, but when the new guitar arrives and I open the case, it will be love at first strum. The moral? Remember to love the one you're with, as it could be a quick turn of the heart or a passing magazine ad that breaks up a guitarist and his muse. But, to borrow from Shakespeare, ''Tis better to have strummed and lost than never to have fretted at all!'

Edward Baldwin *via email*



Telecaster or PRS: no easy choice

G&B Wise words, Edward, and we're glad that you made the right choice for you. Every guitarist will know the pain of longing for a guitar, but not knowing whether it'll work out – or be worth the sacrifices involved to get it. So when it does comes off, it's truly life-affirming. We also agree that you can get so caught up in the desire to get a particular guitar that it can lessen the pleasure of playing the ones you have. We've found a quick and easy way to stop this is to imagine – for just a few seconds – what life would be like without any guitars at all. The horror of that notion makes you appreciate what you have...

Rosetti

Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your Fusion gig bag – electric, acoustic or bass available!

THE PLEASURES OF THE FLESH

Being of a certain age, I remember well the days before YouTube and the internet and having to struggle to learn the guitar without any lessons. However, as much as online lessons can be really helpful in helping you improve as a guitar player (as are books, lessons, and everything else – including, you know, actually spending time playing the guitar), I still believe the greatest motivating thing you can do (as well as educational) is to go and see guitarists play live. I've got a couple of teenage sons who are learning to play (I'm coming to terms with the fact that they'll probably be better than me by Christmas), and the only credit I can really take for their progress is to take them along to gigs. That includes my kind of blues-rock as well as their 'young person' music. There's nothing like seeing a guitar player from close quarters. It inspires you to play (especially when you can see the effect a good band has on an audience), and to steal bits of pieces from them and use them yourself. Best of all, it makes you believe that learning to play isn't an impossible task. By all means, put the hours in at home or in your rehearsal room, but you'll learn all the quicker by going to see guitar players play live.

Paul Matteus *via email*

G&B Couldn't have put it better ourselves...

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MARSHALL: A TRUE BRITISH SUCCESS STORY

Your story on Marshall amps was a great read. I was particularly glad that you focused on Jim and the people within the company itself. Of course, the way the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Pete Townshend used the amps did a lot to get players turned on to the Marshall sound, but I've always thought that the people who brought the amps into the world never got enough credit. I've still got my old JMP-1 and to this day it remains my favourite device, bar none.

Having visited Hanwell (and Milton Keynes) in my time, it always gives me a chuckle to think that these not-incredibly-rock'n'roll places can lay claim to being the home of such a pivotal rock sound. I've never been to America, but I wonder if the birthplaces of companies such as Fender, Gibson, Martin and the like are similarly suburban. Reading stories about places such as Kalamazoo in your magazine over the years make them seem incredibly glamorous, but they probably aren't to Americans.

Anyway, regardless of the birthplace of Marshall, they should be praised for spreading the rock gospel all over the world.

Graham Farmer *via email*

G&B **Whilst Hanwell or Milton Keynes are fine places, we take your point, Graham. If there are any readers out there who live near similar landmark guitar locations around the world, feel free to let us know about the general vibe of the place. But we suppose you shouldn't be too harsh or surprised; after all, what you're talking about here are essentially workshops and factories. They may be fascinating to the likes of us, but they probably don't look suitably 'rock'n'roll' from the outside...**

EASY ON THE DISTORTION

The letter from Colin Richards in the September issue, regarding reading glasses' distortion highlights a common trait with spectacles. The strongest of my reading glasses – I have three pairs according to required viewing distance – visibly skews the horizontals. The extent depends on the angle of the arms relative to the lenses. Too much in one plane will result in concave horizontals, too much in the other and one will experience seemingly convex 'straight' lines. It's disconcerting, and the stronger the prescription the more noticeable the distortion. With careful adjustment by the optician it can be minimised but, in my experience, not entirely eliminated. If I need to do any accurate sightings or measurements I'll put on a weaker pair where this is not an issue. Even if things might appear a tad blurry!

Jerry Uwins *via email*

Zemaitis reissue – but what became of Peter Green's original?

G&B **Much obliged Jerry. Just to clarify, Jerry Uwins was the long-time *G&B* acoustic guitar guru, and knows all too well the perils of judging guitar measurements using correctional lenses. So his advice, as always, is well worth heeding...**

PETER GREEN AND THE MISSING ZEMAITIS MYSTERY

Regards to your article in August issue about Peter Green, his brother Len and I were close friends and I saw Peter's rise to stardom. Back in the mid-'70s Peter was unwell and came to live with his parents on Canvey Island. He spent many hours in my home and my eldest son, then aged 11, learned to play guitar with Peter's assistance. At that time Peter would bring with him his Tony Zemaitis acoustic, a wonderful sounding instrument. Of all the articles I have read regarding Peter and his guitars, his Zemaitis is never mentioned. Peter told me he used it during the recording of *Albatross*. He gave my son this guitar; he said at the time he had no use for it. About three years later I remember him coming to the house to ask if he could borrow the guitar, which he did. Sadly, Peter later told me it had been stolen. Over the years I often wonder who has this guitar, and who ever has it knows that it was originally made for Peter Green. I asked Peter a year or so ago if he knew of its whereabouts, and if he had ever got it back. Unfortunately, he told me it had never been returned to him.

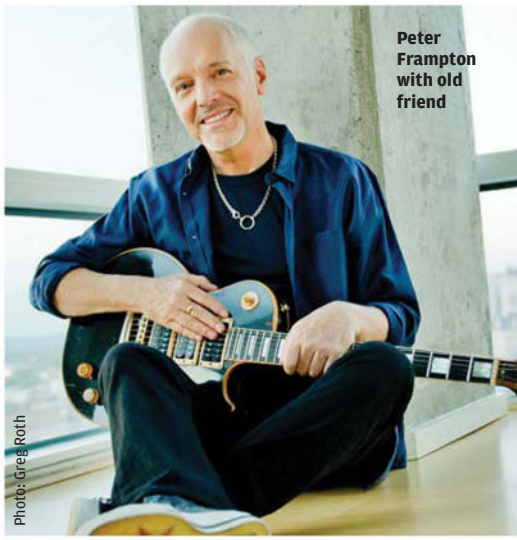
Brian Garner *via email*

SHOW THEM THE WAY

As a teenager in California back in the mid-'70s, I recall how *Frampton Comes Alive!* was an album that you couldn't escape from at one point. Indeed, I'll confess I not only took up the guitar, but tried to copy his look (failing miserably) in a bid to look cooler to girls (again failing miserably). However, I never held that against Peter and I became a big fan of his guitar playing. After some challenging times, it's great to read about him and see how much he still loves music and his playing. I hope getting his treasured guitar back inspires him to even greater heights.

Maurice Gelf *via email*

G&B **We're glad you enjoyed the article, Maurice, and we admire your candour, regarding copying your look in an attempt to win over potential love interests. Not that we've ever done that, at all. And there are no photographs to prove it. Honest.**



Peter Frampton with old friend

Photo: Greg Roth

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Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

Popular Demand

Fender revives both guitar and bass versions of two much sought-after semi-hollow models, the Starcaster and the Coronado

Fender's Starcaster and Coronado have long been cult favourites amongst guitarists and as a result have been none to easy for fans to track down. Fender has taken note of the demand, and this month the company reissues both these elegant rarities.

The Starcaster, Fender's only offset-waist semi-hollow guitar, was introduced in the mid-'70s but discontinued soon after. This new Modern Player version has the shapely headstock much admired on the original but comes beautified with a bound maple top and back and bound f-holes. The C-profile maple neck has a maple fretboard, and the 22 medium jumbo frets should suit today's players nicely. Fender's Wide Range humbuckers provide the tone, and a three-way toggle switch allows for the usual tweaks. Finishing touches include a black three-ply pickguard, skirted amp-style knobs, an Adjusto-Matic bridge with anchored tailpiece and a choice of natural, black or aged cherryburst finishes.

The matching bass originally only made it to the prototype stage but now the new short-scale four-string Starcaster bass shares all the guitar's features... aside from a four-saddle Hi-Mass bridge.

The Modern Player Coronado makes a welcome return with an alder centre-block, bound top and back and classy bound f-holes. The maple neck has a neat bound rosewood fingerboard with 21 medium jumbo frets and white pearloid block inlays to add a touch of flair. The Coronado is armed with a pair of Fideli-Tron humbuckers controlled via a toggle switch and skirted control knobs. The Adjusto-Matic bridge is married to a chic floating 'F' trapeze tailpiece, and gloss finish options include three-colour sunburst, black, classic candy apple red and a deep black cherry burst.

Also a rarity in its heyday, the Coronado bass is back too and follows the build and features of its six-string sibling. A round of applause to Fender for bringing back these stunning 'lost' guitars. Survey all the eye-candy at www.fender.com.

Past Glories

DigiTech has announced a return to the '80s with the rebirth of the ever-popular pedal brand DOD and two pioneering old favourites, the Phasor 201 and Overdrive Preamp 250 pedals. The look and feel of the pedals honour the original stompboxes,but the details have been tweaked to suit the modern guitarist. The Phasor 201 was one of the very first phaser units on the market and the reissue revisits the unmistakable analogue sound of its cousin, with a single knob control for fine tuning. The infamously crunchy Overdrive Preamp 250 maintains its simple Gain and Level controls but has a higher output for an even tougher tone. Both units have been updated to include true bypass, LED indicators, 9V adaptor jack and a neat two-tone metallic flake finish. More at www.digitech.com.

POCKET STUDIO

Following IK Multimedia's excellent iRig HD comes the new iRig Pro, a universal digital mobile audio/MIDI interface for iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch and Mac. The ultra-portable battery-powered iRig Pro is compatible with pretty much all audio and MIDI inputs (including both dynamic and condenser mics), providing users with a compact interface ideal for recording on the move. What's more, both audio and MIDI inputs can be used simultaneously; there's a preamp gain control and it comes with a sizable suite of IK's production apps including Amplitude, VocaLive, Sample Tank, iGrand and iRig Recorder to get your teeth into. It also comes with three cables: 30-pin, lightning, and USB. Details over at www.ikmultimedia.com.

London Live

This month Joe Bonamassa releases his live DVD box set *Tour De Force – Live In London*, recorded over a four-night stint in various London venues earlier in the year and featuring some songs that Joe had never performed live. The gigs began in the intimate surroundings of the Borderline as a three-piece, followed by a full blues band show at Shepherds Bush Empire, an acoustic and electric gig at Hammersmith Apollo, until finally closing at the Royal Albert Hall for a greatest hits set. Each night is available as a double DVD/Blu-Ray set, and the Collector's Set combines all four, housed in a cute Marshall amp box. See www.jbonamassa.com for tracklists.

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OFF THE BAT

Gibson Brands displays a pair of stylish new SG models

'Captain' Kirk Douglas can been seen showing off his versatile licks as part of The Roots, who also serve as the house band on US talkshow *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon*. Douglas has a fine selection of axes including everything from a Les Paul Goldtop to a vintage Epiphone Crestwood, but it is his SG Custom that Gibson has chosen to reproduce for this rather flashy new signature. The guitar has a plush trio of '57 Classic humbuckers wired up to push-pull pots that dial in the centre pickup via a TogPot switch. There's a luxurious gold Lyre tailpiece engraved with 'Captain' for added cool, and the back of the headstock has both a 'dual roses' insignia and Kirk's signature decal. The guitar is completed with a double-wide pickguard and a tasty vintage cherry nitro finish. Also new this month is the sleek Alpine White SG Baritone with oversized mahogany body, Richlite fretboard and 496R (neck) and 500T (bridge) humbuckers with push-pull coil splitting for low-end tonal tweaking. Take your pick! See www.gibson.com.

Cort In Session

Cort salutes their 20th anniversary in eloquent style with the upmarket Artisan limited edition basses. The new models are built using choice materials and feature a special 20th Anniversary logo on the electronics cover plate. The Artisan A Custom 20th has a ritzy birdseye maple top and back, a through-body nine-piece neck built from a fusion of bubinga, maple and African wenge, and an Indian rosewood fretboard. The tone matches the look thanks to Bartolini Custom MK4CBC pickups and an HR5.4AP preamp. The dashing swamp ash-bodied B 20th (pictured) has a five-piece African wenge and rosewood neck with African wenge fretboard and Bartolini MK-1 pickups and preamp. Fine tune your sound via master volume, blend control, three-band EQ and nifty frequency switch; four-string and five-string models are available. Details: www.cortguitars.com.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Manson Charity Windfall

Manson Guitars' charity auction for a rare Matthew Bellamy signature MB-1 guitar signed by Muse has raised over £55,000 in support of both Marie Curie Cancer Care and Progressive Supranuclear Palsy Association. The auction should make the top 10 celebrity charity auctions this year. A generous donation to two great causes – we salute you! www.mansonguitarworks.com

Let It Slide

New precision-moulded handmade glass slides arrive from USA manufacturer Rock Slide this month. These lightweight glass designs maintain the features that have made the Rock Slide steel models first choice for a host of players including Billy Gibbons and Jimmy Vaughan. Models include the Finger Rest, the Knuckle Cut and the Tapered Interior. See more at www.madisonandfifth.com; price £21.

Timber Tones

New plectrums from Timber Tones include the Groove Tones and Groove Tones Mini lines designed with comfort and note response at the fore. There are four picks in each line, all CNC-milled and hand finished in exotic tonewood offcuts as well as buffalo bone and horn. Cost is £4 each/£15 pack of four; timber-tones.com.

Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

Bruce Foxton On Tour

OCTOBER-DECEMBER

After the success of last year's *In The City* tour, Bruce Foxton and From The Jam are out on the road for the *All Mod Cons 35th Anniversary Tour*, a mammoth outing which began in September and continues until the end of the year.

WHERE? **Venues throughout the UK**
TICKETS **See venues**
CONTACT **www.brucefoxton.com**

Art Guitars Exhibition

17-25 OCTOBER

Marlow Art Guitars and West London Art Factory are clubbing together for this intriguing exhibition showing off art collaborations from Inkie, Carne Griffiths, Pure Evil and more. Plans are also afoot for a celebrity musician-painted guitar auction.

WHERE? **West London Art Factory, London W3 6UG**
TICKETS **Free**
CONTACT **www.westlondonartfactory.com**

Frome Blues Festival

27 OCTOBER

Solid Entertainments present a full-day of top blues acts including Climax Blues Band, the Nimmo Brothers, Jo Harman & Company, Innes Sibun, Ron Sayer Jr and Albany Down.

WHERE? **Cheese and Grain, Frome**
TICKETS **£26**
CONTACT **www.fromebluesfestival.co.uk**

Blues Fest London

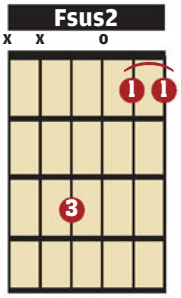
29 OCTOBER – 1 NOVEMBER

This immense blues spectacular returns with performances from Tedeschi Trucks Band, Bobby Womack, Van Morrison, Chris Rea, the Ronnie Wood Band, Robert Plant, Oli Brown, Dr Feelgood, Ian Siegal, Marcus Bonfanti and Matt Schofield. An unmissable event for blues lovers!

WHERE? **Royal Albert Hall, London**
TICKETS **From £10–£125**
CONTACT **www.bluesfest.co.uk**

The Lost Chord

Also known as F5add2, of the numerous voicings of Fsus2 this one shouldn't be too tricky for most guitarists to master and it's a healthy addition to anyone's chord armoury. Using your first finger to barre the top strings frees up your other digits to add a progression using the A string. Slide the shape up the frets for more interesting sounds.



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PANDORA'S BOXES

Korg's first-generation Pandora multi-FX processor was unleashed in the mid-'90s and crammed a whole cache of effects into a box little bigger than a cassette tape (hey, remember those?). Now they feel that it's time to breathe life into the concept once more with the new Pandora Stomp. The sturdy diecast body holds 158 modelling effects within (seven of which can be used simultaneously) and there are over 200 presets and 100 rhythm loops, making it ideal for private jam sessions. Other features include the all-important auto tuner, an LED meter for foot orientation through the dry ice cloud, and a handy Aux input for hooking up an mp3 player. A solitary footswitch flicks between program memories, and four program slots can be accessed via one-touch recall. If black is too drab, try one of the limited edition colours – ivory or orange. Explore its capabilities at www.korg.com.

WE'VE BEEN AD...

LADY OF THE LAKE

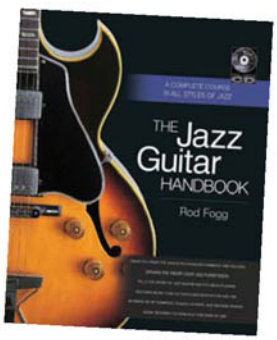
Ahhhh, to be back in the 1970s... those innocent, halcyon days when one could don one's finest sleeveless cavewoman garb and sit undisturbed on the edge of the nearest watery idyll, strumming love songs into the night. It's a nice idea, but this beautiful young songstress seems totally oblivious to the fact that, while the jetty on which she has so gracefully seated herself lies adjacent to an incredibly stunning vista, half of said pier has collapsed unceremoniously into the depths. Perhaps her boyfriend's eight-piece psychedelic project chose it as a 'break from the studio' and caused the crash. And another thing... has she never *seen Jaws*? You know, the bit where the endearing old fisherman is dragged kicking and screaming to a salty demise via a mahoosive great white shark? It could, of course, just be a lake... in which case she's safe. Or at least, safer.

Grandmeister Flash

After the success of the trailblazing TubeMeister series, Hughes & Kettner is forging ahead once more with the new all-valve GrandMeister 36W head. For the GrandMeister, H&K has taken an analogue amp and added high-spec effects and Smart Rotary Controls that enable players to actually program their tube tone in real time, which is impressive. 'Our developers have created a unique feature that opens a new chapter in controlling tube-driven tone,' says H&K's Rüdiger Forse. 'You can remote control every single pot and switch simply by MIDI – with any MIDI footswitch, an expression pedal or even with an iPad.' The amp follows in the footsteps of the TubeMeister with H&K's excellent Red Box DI output and a unique blue-lit dashboard but adds a palette of classic effects including reverb, tap delay, flange, phase, tremolo and chorus and full programmability of the four valve channels, the effects and the power soak. The amp functions perfectly without a MIDI controller, but for ultimate control choose between the new FSM 432 MkIII MIDI board or download the free iPad app. The world's first programmable all-valve analogue amp? We're all ears. Info: www.hughes-and-kettner.com.

Backbeat Jazz

***The Jazz Guitar Handbook*, released by Backbeat Books this month, is a complete course for budding jazzers and it offers a step-by-step guide to help players master this demanding genre. Beginning with elementary blues licks put to straightforward chord progressions, this book progresses through scales, chords and theory right up to advanced harmony and improvisation techniques. Over 100 exercises cover everything from jazzy blues, swing, bebop, modal and jazz-funk to gypsy jazz, and a superb accompanying 96-track CD brings each stage to life. On top of the tutorials there's an illustrated history of jazz guitars plus biographies of the stars who played them. A must-have aid for jazz wannabees. More info at www.backbeatbooks.com.**



EHX PEDALS

Two characteristically colourful new noiseboxes wing their way over from Electro-Harmonix this month – the East River Drive distortion and the reissued Hot Tubes Nano overdrive. The East River Drive was named after the river that divides Queens and Manhattan and promises to be 'as bold as New York City'. As such, this classy-looking unit is their first to be based on the JRC4558 chip and allows guitarists to dial in sweet'n'gentle gain, classic scorching distortion and everything in between via the standard Volume, Tone and Drive controls. The Hot Tubes Nano is claimed to be an authentic reproduction of its popular (and now very costly) '70s predecessor but with smaller, pedalboard-friendly dimensions. The unit uses the same CMOS overdrive circuit, meaning the pedal is highly sensitive to pick attack for subtle vintage tube tones or fat low-end gain. Controls include Volume, Tone and Overdrive knobs as well as a handy Tone on/off switch to disengage the tone circuit. Both feature true bypass. Delectable new foot furniture is always welcome with us! See www.ehx.com for more.

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CRUSH PRO

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ROCK SOLID

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CR120H
PPC412COM

CR60 Combo

Play Orange Amps with Rocksmith 2014 Edition
Plug in any electric guitar or bass directly into your Orange PC and consoles to learn songs, improve your skills, or even jam with a custom virtual band.

The fastest way to learn guitar*

*The Fastest Way To Learn Guitar: Research Strategy Group Inc – March 2013 US nationwide in-home placement study.

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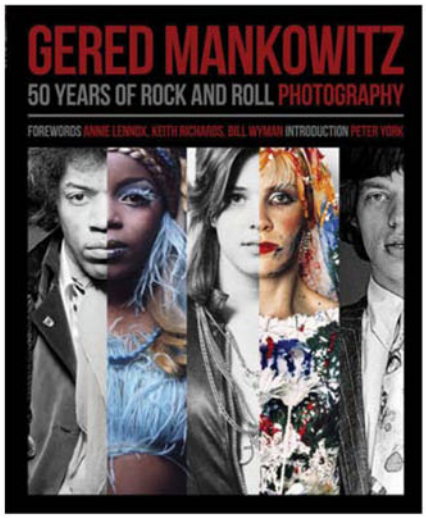
Woke up this mornin'...

NEWS



ROCK STOCK

Goodman has announced the upcoming publication of a first-class new photographic anthology by Gered Mankowitz. Entitled *50 Years Of Rock And Roll Photography*, this irresistible glossy tome begins with a foreword from Annie Lennox and goes on to display Mankowitz's priceless skill behind the lens via iconic shots of famous artists such as the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Suzi Quatro, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, Status Quo, Suede, and many more – and there are plenty of anecdotes that sit side by side with the images, too. If you fancy a sneaky peek then head over to Snap Galleries in Piccadilly, where an exhibition of Mankowitz's photos will run until 2 November. *50 Years Of Rock And Roll Photography* is out in December – just in time for Christmas.

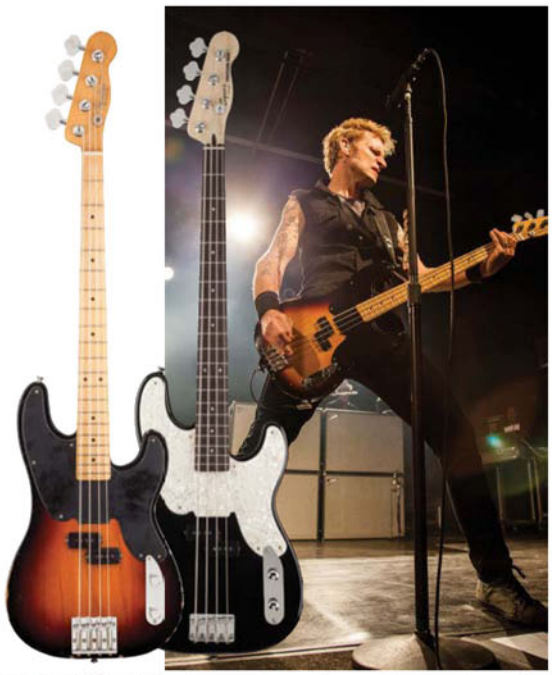
Seagull Acoustics

Godin Guitars has released a new trio of affordable Seagulls. The North American-made Excursion Series guitars are built with a wild cherry hardwood three-layer lamination for the top, back and sides. They come dressed in simple yet handsome natural custom-polished finishes with neat 'burn stamped' rosettes, the super-slim necks are silver leaf maple while the fingerboards and bridges are rosewood. Players can choose from parlour, folk or dreadnought body shapes, and at only £349 they look like being great start-up models for fledgling rock stars. See www.seagullguitars.com for more.

FENDER ON THE MIKE

This month Fender and Squier reveal their latest punk rock signature four-strings for Green Day's bass man Mike Dirnt

Having nurtured a three-decade career, Green Day are obviously doing something right – so it seems fitting that Fender has upped the ante for these two vintage-styled basses. The Fender Mike Dirnt Road Worn Precision (left) has an ash body, a 20-fret maple neck and a choice of a maple or rosewood board. Gritty tone comes from a volcanic custom '59 split single-coil pickup, while a custom neckplate and a '51-style headstock add to the vintage look. This hardy rocker comes in a choice of classic sunburst or white blonde lacquer relic finishes. Dirnt's Squier model (right) has also been upgraded with the same '50s Precision styling and a newly-positioned neckplate star graphic, and it's available in black with a four-ply aged pearloid pickguard or in arctic white with a three-ply tortoiseshell guard. Fans can delve deeper at www.fender.com.



Gimme The Night

Vox unleashes their second generation all-tube Night Train range this month, clad in a fresh-looking black metallic mirrored exterior. There are four versions: 50W, 15W or 2W heads complete with matching cabs, plus a 15W combo. The Night Train NT50H houses two EL34s in the power stage and a trio of 12AX7s in the preamp and features two channels with handy independent sets of tone controls. Its smaller siblings, the NT15H and the NT15C1 combo, both have three 12AX7s and two independent channels: Bright for sumptuous cleans, and Girth for powered-up modern high-gain tones. The baby is the miniaturised and very bedroom-friendly two-watt chrome-topped Lil' Night Train complete with a Celestion-fitted matching cab. All models feature reverb, too. For more detailed specs log on to www.voxamps.com.

TOP TOON

After a grand first event in Newcastle, Northern Guitar Shows return to Newcastle Racecourse Exhibition Centre on Sunday 27 October to relive the magic. This excellent show takes place over three floors with over 100 dealers offering a fine opportunity to buy, sell and trade vintage and secondhand gear. Attendees can take advantage of special show deals as well as free instrument and amp appraisals on site. Expect a fine array of stands as well as live music from ex-Argent frontman John Verity, blues rock from the Mentulls, swing guitar from Anthony Purdy and acoustic/delay-loop whizz Johnny Boyle. Entry costs £6; info@guitarshows.co.uk; 01925 813185 or 07850 744604.

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Album reviews

Leslie West
STILL CLIMBING
Provogue

He may have forfeited a leg to diabetes and be verging on 70, but West can still throw his weight around. Sizzling fretwork is a given with iconic digits such as these, and a Dean signature and Blackstar amp marry up nicely to do the rest. His varied inclinations are explored here from bouts of dynamic riff-driven splendour and ground-shaking ballads to assured takes on old faves. Still a man mountain.

Anna Calvi
ONE BREATH
Domino

Calvi's swooning single *Eliza* has charmed the airwaves of late and is a fine introduction to her newest release from the shadows. Sweetly morose in places, filmic in others and all the more entrancing with every spin, *One Breath* exhibits a unique talent of both voice and guitar. Her nature veers addictively from crisp and close-up to powerful spectacle, with the occasional noisome shimmer.

Martin Barre
AWAY WITH WORDS
Edifying

As Jethro Tull's lead guitarist, Barre fashioned his own influential strain of folk-prog stringery. For his fourth solo LP, he ventures into Tull territory less-trodden to spin a labyrinthine web of acoustic tones with mandolin, bodhran, clarinet, flute and bouzouki all joining the guitar in the mix. Fresh ideas meet with new takes on *Moths*, *Fire At Midnight* and our fave, *From A Deadbeat To A Greaser*.

BabaJack
RUNNING MAN
R-R-R-Records

BabaJack sound like a duo we need to see live, though that's not to say their lurching grooves don't come across on this tense and rootsy stew. On the contrary, Becky Tate's vocal presence and box-drum beat are a fine focus and Trevor Steger's self-built 'WineBox' guitars supply a Cooder-esque tilt; it's as natural as it is enticing. Bluesy currents push and pull and a funky rhythmic heart beats at the core. Storm-stirring stuff.

Trivium
VENGEANCE FALLS
Roadrunner

Trivium serve up this month's dose of organised noise with a leviathan of an LP that's tighter than a teenager's wetsuit and heavier than a trucker's convention. The title track rolls out the full armoury in striking form; *Strife* is a herculean grindfest and *To Believe* is a potent, eardrum pulverising smackdown. With barraging kick drum, robust riffs and vocal punch, Trivium are at the height of their powers.

David Becker Tribune
DISTANCE TRAVELLED
Acoustic Music

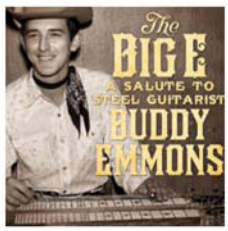
Something about jazz played by a trio perpetually wins us over, and this is no exception. There's space for Becker's soothing bebop chops to stretch out unencumbered, room for brother Bruce to really swing behind the kit, and ample air left to grasp Bolle Diekman's exquisite fretless. A calm veneer spreads out across this blissful set, Latin flavours trickle through, and a version of the Eagles' *Desperado* is a cultivated triumph.

Dr Feelgood
GET RHYTHM: THE BEST OF, 1984-1987
Salvo

When frontman Lee Brilleaux recruited a fresh Feelgood line-up in the early '80s he brought on a new spell for the R&B pub-rockers. Here we have two discs of the finest cuts of the period including tracks from *Doctor's Orders* and *Mad Man Blue*s as well as the *Brilleaux* and *Classic* LPs in their entirety. The Feelgood spark lights up each of the standards they tackle and their juiced-up, home-spun sound is one of a kind.

The Big E: A Salute To Steel Guitarist Buddy Emmons
VARIOUS
Music Producers Institute

Though retired, the masterful Mr Emmons is still a shining light for pedal steel players. For this tribute, Country Music Hall Of Famers mingle with the steel elite to take on 16 tracks spanning his incredible musical innings. Vince Gill kills *Country Boy*, Greg Leisz owns *Wild Mountain Thyme*, and Raul Malo makes light work of Willie Nelson's *Night Life*. Glorious.



North Mississippi Allstars
WORLD BOOGIE IS COMING
South Of South/Thirty Tigers

Inspired by motivational words from Seasick Steve, Luther and Cody Dickinson assembled a band of their nearest and dearest and stepped out of their comfort zone to add a new cinematic narrative to their sound. The familiar foot-stomping threads of Memphis blues, southern boogie and R&B remain but with an updated ambience woven in. Primal, slide-happy grooves with acres of soul.

SNAP JUDGEMENTS

Flying Colours
LIVE IN EUROPE
Mascot
With only one album out a live double CD/DVD seems a tad premature for a second outing, but Steve Morse and company do an astounding job on stage

Bonafide
BOMBO
Off Yer Rocka
Swedish hard rock outfit Bonafide plant a foot on the monitor for a crotch-grabbing, hair whipping riot of an album. Not for everyone, but why not?

Blitzen Trapper
VII
Lojink
Jaunty Americana is the order of the day and Blitzen Trapper make fine work of it, hammering out strong melodies, day-to-day lyrics and ripe grooves

The Crunch
BUSY MAKING NOISE
Legal
The Crunch are a trio of underground punk veterans with a no-frills roadbound punk manifesto. Add pop-rock sensibilities and it's an effective mix

Lindi Ortega
TIN STAR
Last Gang
With hints of Dolly Parton's lyrical wit, a sweet'n'sour '50s countrified twang and bags of melody, Ortega breathes fresh spirit into familiar themes

Soulfly
SAVAGES
Nuclear Blast
Guests in tow, Max Cavalera's Soulfly return with a mammoth album encapsulating their raw tribal thrash roots and, frankly, slaying the competition

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Photo: Mike Prior

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Beauty of THE BEAST

Add another 1959 Gibson Les Paul to the legend..., **Bernie Marsden** tells **Michael Stephens** all about his Beast 'burst, its 2013 Gibson replica and the real truth about that Eric Clapton 'Beano' rumour...

We all know about the apparent 'mojo' of 1958-1960 Gibson Les Pauls. Initially poor-sellers, sunbursts – 'bursts for short – have become fabled in the hands of legendary players. Eric Clapton and his Beano LP. Peter Green's (and later Gary Moore's) Greeny. Jimmy Page's #1 and #2. Duane Allman's '59 cherryburst. Billy F Gibbons' Pearly Gates, and many more. Whether it's rarity or something special about the build, '58-'60 Les Pauls have now become the most sought-after electric guitars in the world.

Now you can add another to the list – 'The Beast' belonging to Bernie Marsden. In 2013, Gibson recreated the guitar and named the result the Collector's Choice #8 1959 Les Paul 'The Beast'. Despite the $11k price-tag, the 300 Beast replicas sold out immediately. With 40 years as a top and arguably under-appreciated player, Marsden has his own respect among blues-rock cognoscenti – but what of Bernie's Beast Les Paul, used from early days in Wild Turkey, Babe Ruth, '70s sessions for producer Mickie Most and onto Whitesnake, where mega-hits *Fool For Your Loving* and *Here I Go Again* were played and written on this very guitar? The Beast has a fascinating tale... and it's one which crosses paths with other fabled 'burst stories.

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The Beast is a '59 – to some the most hallowed year of all, which is partly down to the medium-depth neck profiles

Bernie's Beginnings

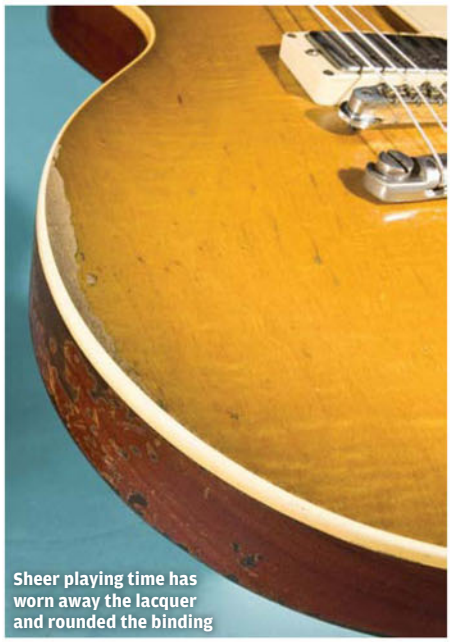
Like most of his peer group, Bernie Marsden was first inspired to play the guitar by seeing the Shadows on television and, later, the Beatles. He had a Hofner Colorama, but soon decided he wanted a Gibson Les Paul. 'There's a picture on my website of me holding an early guitar of mine,' he says, 'but it's not a Gibson – it was a Grimshaw copy. I just pretended it was a Gibson.

'I was mad on Peter Green in my teens. I actually bought that Grimshaw from Jim Marshall himself in Bletchley, on hire purchase. I looked at a vintage ES-335 the same day, but I turned it down – Peter Green didn't play those, so I wasn't interested. Curses! I just wanted a Les Paul, or something that looked like a Les Paul.'

When Marsden got his first big break with UFO in 1973 (before Michael Schenker joined), he was mainly using a Fender Stratocaster, an SG Les Paul and a Gibson Firebird. 'And I got my first genuine Gibson Les Paul at the time, also... but not *the* Les Paul. The first I had was a reissue, a refinished Gold Top. I didn't know that at the time, but it obviously was, as it had a wraparound bridge. Then I got a three-pickup Custom, just like Peter Frampton's, as I really liked the look of that guitar. But soon I was out of UFO and joined Wild Turkey [founded by ex-Jethro Tull bassist Glen Cornick] and I found The Beast.

'This guy Martin ["Mart"] Henderson showed up to a Wild Turkey gig one day and just said to me, "I've got a guitar you might like." He got it out of the case and, obviously, it was marvellous. I asked him how much he wanted, but his price was just impossible. He was a drummer himself, not a guitarist, but he collected Les Pauls. He was a Wild Turkey fan, so he came back to another gig the next week saying we could do a part-exchange. He didn't seem to be a particularly money-orientated guy, but I told him: "Look, I don't even have half the money."

'But Mart came back to the next gig at the Marquee and got backstage at the end, before the encore. He had the guitar again and just said, "Look, try it. I want to hear you play it."'



Sheer playing time has worn away the lacquer and rounded the binding

Even on that first Wild Turkey encore, Marsden says his newly-acquired '59 sounded far more aggressive than any other guitar he'd ever played: 'The rest of the band thought I'd turned up my amp by about 5 notches! It was just a great-sounding Les Paul. It was a brilliant way of selling it to me, really. So I swapped him my black Les Paul Custom and a Stratocaster I had... I still owed him even after that, but he just said I could pay him when I had the money.

'It had Schallers on it when I bought it, but I always thought they just looked a bit ugly. So I changed them to Grovers at first, but I got some original Klusons eventually, and that's what it's had for many years. Mick Ralphs of Bad Company [a friend and ex-flatmate of Bernie's in the early '70s] was notorious for taking stuff off guitars – a pickup here, a pickup there. But he was very good at it, and I never have been. So I didn't mess with The Beast too much. I couldn't be bothered! But I've still got the 40-year-old Grovers I did have fitted. But nothing's changed since.

'You can see in the pictures that the bridge appears original. Other than the tuners, it's all original – as it was when I bought it.'

The Beast and The Beano?

Marsden saw Mart Henderson again, around a year later. 'That's when the first mention of Eric Clapton came up,' recalls Bernie. 'He told

'As soon as Jeff Beck opened the case, he goes, "Oh, was this Eric's?" And I said, "Maybe!" I honestly didn't know'

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All the cherry dye has faded from the finish in Bernie's 40-year-ownership

me that, apparently, it was a Blues Breakers Les Paul... but I'd already heard that that one had been stolen. But in 1974, this wasn't such a big deal, anyway. There were lots of sunburst Les Pauls knocking around. I remember that Spencer Davis had one, which he was advertising in one of the West End shops for the princely sum of £225! Although that was something of a king's ransom in those days. [Editor's note: it would be £2000 today, a bargain for a '58-'60 sunburst.]

'But the Eric story was a good story, so I decided: well, I won't say it is, I won't say it's not. So, yes, it was me who really perpetuated the story of what the guitar might be.'

However, it wasn't only Bernie Marsden who thought his guitar was just maybe the Les Paul that Eric Clapton had played on the John Mayall and the Blues Breakers 'Beano' album. By the time Marsden had joined Cozy Powell's Hammer – that's The Beast all over Top 10 hit *Na Na Na* – others were commenting too. Powell's ex-bandleader Jeff Beck turned up to an early Hammer show. 'I was really excited to meet Jeff, first time in person, and he asked to see what I was playing,' says Marsden. 'As soon as he opened the case, Jeff goes: "Oh, was this Eric's?" I just replied, "Maybe." I honestly didn't know.

'Then, a few years later, I was doing a solo record and Jack Bruce was in the studio with ➧➧

As you can tell from the back of the guitar, the Beast has a fair few miles on the clock

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MARSDEN'S PRS SE

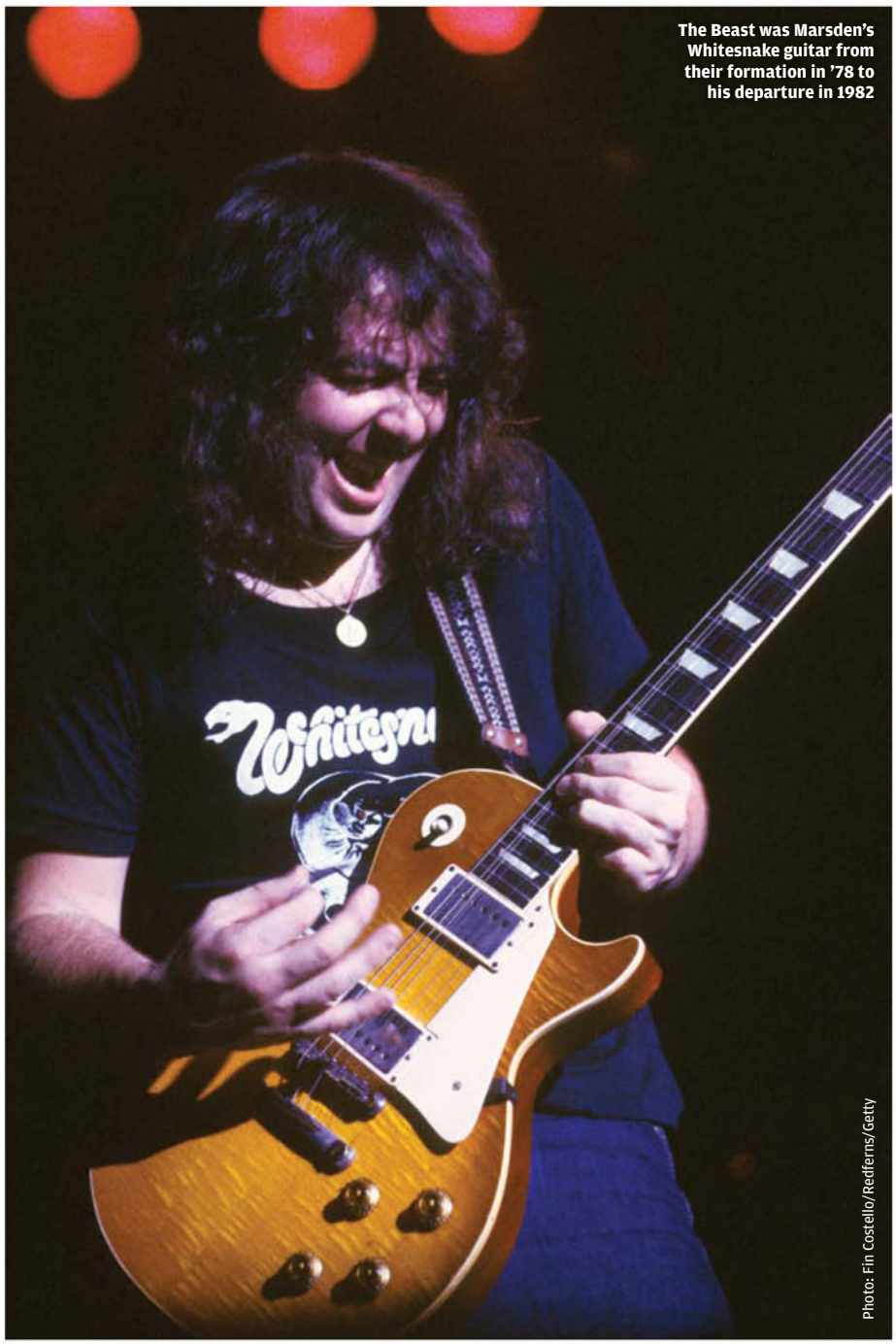
Bernie isn't just known for playing a 54-year-old Gibson: he has a thing for a modern guitar as well...

Bernie Marsden has his own signature PRS SE guitars – a small run that soon became a production model, and a more recent 53/10 Ltd model (only 50 shipped to the UK.) A PRS is not a Gibson Les Paul, of course – and vice versa – but Bernie still values his PRS guitars.

'Paul Reed Smith rang me out of the blue and said he wanted to do a BM guitar. I was honoured. I'm a fan – I've got a 1990s PRS Ted McCarty model which I love. But I wanted the guitar to be more affordable than a vintage Gibson, so we decided on an SE model, Korean-made. I really like it. It's different, of course, to The Beast.'

At circa £700 (£950 for 53/10 Ltd model), the PRS SE Bernie Marsden is a long way from a Gibson Collector's Choice #8 or the original Beast. But Bernie insists, 'Specification-wise, it is in many ways a copy of The Beast. The neck is the same, so, in a way, The Beast is always with me when I'm playing the PRS. And I seem to get an email every day from someone who's just bought an SE, saying how much they like the guitar. That's great in itself.'

The Marsden SE has a wide/fat neck, real body binding and a 24.5" scale



The Beast was Marsden's Whitesnake guitar from their formation in '78 to his departure in 1982

Photo: Fin Costello/Redferns/Getty

me, and he said, "That looks familiar. Was that Eric's?" So they both said the same thing on sight. Now, Jeff and Jack both knew Eric's guitars better than me, so I started thinking: well, maybe this was Eric Clapton's.'

The name of The Beast also came from Marsden's days with Cozy Powell. 'I can't be sure who it was now,' recalls Marsden, 'but I fired into a solo and somebody said; "That guitar sounds unbelievable." And I think I just replied, "Yeah, it's a beast, isn't it?" And Cozy would soon ask when recording tracks, "where's The Beast?" It just stuck. It's nothing to do with devil worship, I can assure you!

'But Don Airey [keyboardist in Hammer and later in Whitesnake] still refers to it, I think, as "Eric". "Where's Eric?" he says. Now, whether that's how the EC fanzine [*Where's Eric?*] got its name, I really don't know. It's quite funny, really. But I can't emphasise enough how this wasn't a big deal in 1974, trading guitars around. There wasn't the kudos there is now. If you had a guitar that used to belong to, say, Jeff Beck, people would just say, "Oh, nice." Not "Oh, wow!" But it's all changed in 40 years. I guess Cadillacs were quite ordinary when they came out. Now, if you have a '50s Cadillac, it's treasure.'

The Number Of The Beast

With a serial number of 9-1914, Bernie's Beast is a 1959. Clapton's Beano LP was almost definitely a '60, due to Eric's recalling of its 'very slim' neck. Marsden says he's never openly claimed it's the same guitar as the Beano Les Paul, nor did he deny it. And it wasn't until last year, 2012, that Bernie found out more about the provenance of The Beast.

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'Mart said he had bought The Beast from Andy Fraser, and he bought it from Paul Kossoff, and he got it from Eric Clapton'

'It was December 2012, at the Classic Rock Awards, when I again saw Mart Henderson. And he finally explained. He said he bought The Beast from Andy Fraser of Free. And that Andy had bought it from Paul Kossoff. And Paul Kossoff had got it from Eric Clapton... so there you go, that's the apparent connection.'

This is, possibly, the true history of The Beast. Kossoff and Clapton became friends when Free supported Blind Faith on their US tour of 1969. It's known that Koss swapped a black three-pickup Les Paul Custom for a '58 sunburst of Eric's on that tour – not the Beano Les Paul, as that was stolen in 1966. The '58 itself was auctioned by Christie's in 2000, but maybe the '59 Beast came from another Clapton/Koss trade?

This possibility gains some further legs, courtesy of The Police's Andy Summers. In an interview he gave in the late '90s, Summers stated that after Clapton's Les Paul had been stolen, he'd sold him his own '59 sunburst. If this was the guitar that eventually became known to be The Beast, then its star-studded past becomes even more illustrious.

The Beast isn't played so much these days – as with any 1959 Gibson Les Paul sunburst, it's incredibly valuable. However, it still enjoys significant outings. It's on Bernie's solo album due out in 2014, with guests including Whitesnake's David Coverdale, Don Airey, Ian Paice and (hopefully) Joe Bonamassa. 'It's the solo guitar on four tracks – and believe me, you can tell which four.'

It's also been played by Bonamassa, now a close friend of Bernie's, who Marsden has guested with on JB's ever-bigger UK shows. 'The real pleasure now is hearing others play it,' says Bernie. 'When Joe played it, I finally got to hear it as a listener, y'know? When you're playing live, you never really hear what a guitar sounds like. But in Joe's hands, it sounded great. I know Joe told Gibson, "I've just played the greatest Les Paul I've ever known." And now, here we are, with Gibson making a replica.' (The story of the new #8 Beast replica is outlined below.)

Whatever its provenance, the Beast has become its own legend. Bernie recently ➔

Bernie with the original (left) and replica (right)

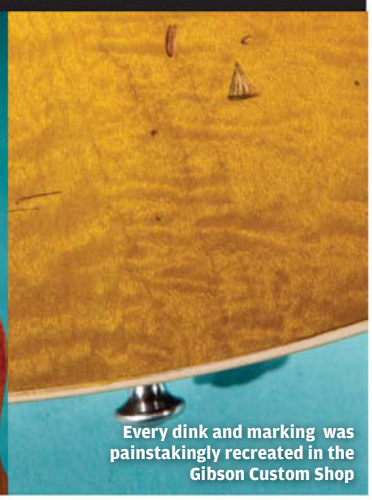
BUILDING THE PERFECT BEAST

Gibson Collector's Choice #8 'The Beast'

This year, Gibson set out to faithfully recreate The Beast. It was a strictly limited edition run of 300, and Gibson sold them all to dealers within days. #8 comes at a true premium price, but you do get an astonishing replica. 'Gibson Custom spent three days just measuring it,' says Bernie. 'It's an amazing piece of work.'

As with any replica, it comes with all the ageing, dings, scratches you see on the original Beast. The body is the same, one-piece mahogany design. The neck has the same '59 profile. There are no original '59 PAFs fitted, alas, but the pickups too were carefully analysed, resulting in two custom-wound Burstbuckers that recreate the unique tone of Bernie's guitar. You get a single-layer rosewood fingerboard, accurate fingerboard and binding colour, and everything has been assembled with hot-hide glue. Indeed, apart from the pickups, everything is historically accurate for a '59, from the truss rod to the nylon 6/6 nut, the holly headstock veneer with pearl Gibson logo, and a set of reissue Kluson Deluxe tuners.

'I was elsewhere when I first sent it to Gibson,' says Bernie, 'so I first saw and played it as a prototype. That was amazing. They'd measured absolutely everything, taken it apart, then rebuilt it. It's incredible. Edwin Wilson, at the Gibson Custom Shop, said it was quite a fiddly job because of the many details – the markings on the back of the neck, and so on. But he was really pleased with how it turned out. The guitar I'm holding in the photo next to the original Beast is #8 serial number 001.'



Every dink and marking was painstakingly recreated in the Gibson Custom Shop

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BERNIE AND THE BEAST

Since acquiring The Beast Les Paul in 1974, Bernie went on to record extensively with it. A brief selection of Beast listening includes...

Cozy Powell's Hammer

Marsden is on Hammer's Top #10 hit *Na Na Na*. He also played (and wrote) *El Sid* from Powell's 1979 solo album *Over The Top*, and appears on Powell's 1981 album *Tilt*.

Babe Ruth and '70s sessions

Marsden and The Beast are on Babe Ruth's *Stealin' Home* (1975). He also did numerous sessions in the mid-1970s, often with producer/svengali Mickie Most. Oddest fact of all? Bernie plays The Beast on Hot Chocolate's *You Sexy Thing*.

Whitesnake

From 1978 to 1982 Marsden was a key member of David Coverdale's Whitesnake. He stayed just long enough to, importantly, write the music for *Here I Go Again* on The Beast for the *Saints And Sinners* album. Reworked on Whitesnake's 1987 album, the song became a US #1 and was recently in movie *Rock Of Ages*. A multi-million selling song.

With Micky Moody

Marsden and fellow Burst-lover Micky Moody from Whitesnake recorded plenty together, mainly live, as The Moody Marsden Band, Company Of Snakes and M3.

Past solo albums

Bernie Marsen recorded two solo albums while with Whitesnake – *And About Time Too!* (1979) and *Look At Me Now* (1981). The Beast also features large on *Green And Blues* ('95), Bernie's tribute to his teen hero Peter Green. The Beast and Greeny Les Pauls are very similar '59 'bursts.

A future solo album

Bernie Marsden is just finishing a new solo album for early 2014 release. It's a Whitesnake reunion, of sorts, with David Coverdale (vocals), Don Airey (keyboards) and Ian Paice (drums) all guesting. Marsden and Coverdale have reworked *Trouble*, one of the first Whitesnake songs they wrote together. 'It's the first time we've recorded together in 31 years,' smiles Bernie. Joe Bonamassa is also due to guest on the album.

'I'm sure 90 per cent is psychological – like an old pair of jeans or favourite shoes that don't wear out. But it does sound amazing'

played a low-key UK store demo when one fan emerged from the crowd and said he'd pay £100 extra to charity just for a photo of himself with Bernie and The Beast. Photo done, a cheque was written. 'Things like that are lovely. I don't think I can ever sell this guitar,' says Bernie.

The Nature Of The Beast

The Beast was Bernie's main guitar for most of the 1970s and early '80s, including his days with Whitesnake. Bernie wrote the music for *Here I Go Again* on The Beast, and although he wasn't even in the band when it was re-recorded for Whitesnake's 1987 album – single and album went to no.1 in the US – The Beast has undoubtedly paid its way in songwriting royalties. But why is it so special?

'I'm sure 90 per cent of it is psychological... a bit like an old pair of jeans or favourite shoes that don't wear out,' Bernie admits. 'But it does sound amazing – it's like a large truck coming at you!

'It was the whole thing, really. The pickups, the weight? Those weren't things that anyone cared about back then. When I first got it, no-one talked about the weight of a Les Paul, whether it was 7lbs, 8lbs or even 9.5lbs. It was just a guitar I wanted.

'We live in different times now,' Bernie smiles. 'People sometimes say, "Oh, why didn't you buy more '59 Les Pauls?" I didn't need to. I had the Les Paul that I wanted, it sounded great, and that was it. Why get another – just to sit on a stand behind me? I can only play one guitar at a time.'

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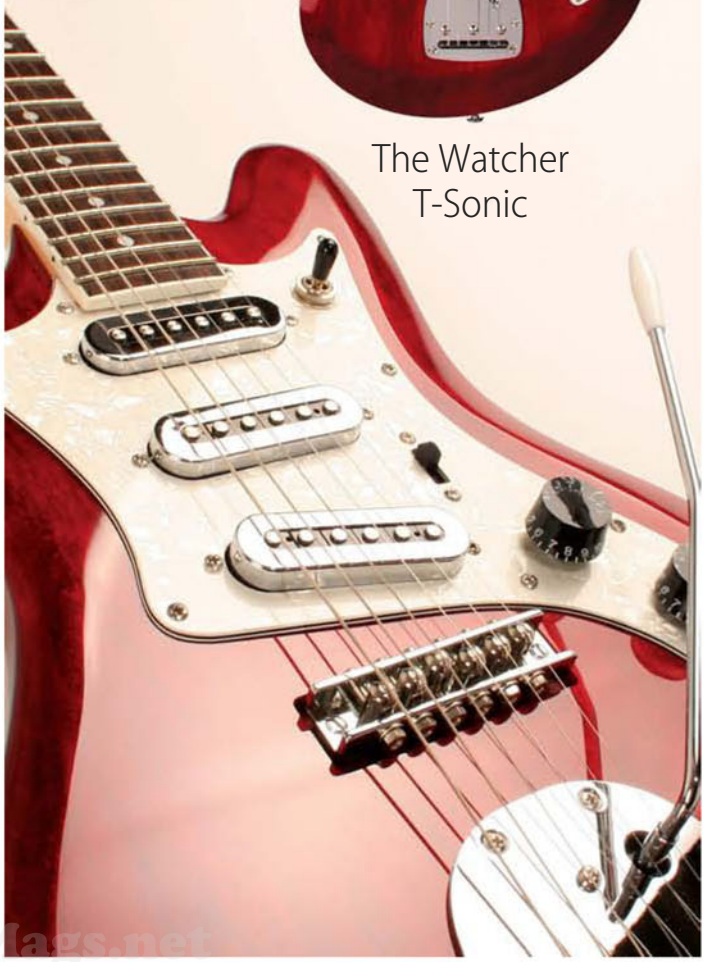

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Three Frets To Heaven

Darrel Higham is capturing all the original fire and excitement of rockabilly without paying slavish tribute to the golden greats. **Steve Bailey** met him to talk of guitars and rock'n'roll

One beautiful summer's day back in 1975 in the house next door to the Higham family residence, someone was playing rock'n'roll loud enough to rattle the pots and pans. It was Elvis Presley on the turntable and, unbeknownst to the neighbours, the effect on the five year-old was profound. Blown away by sound of the King, Darrel found out from his mother that there were Presley LPs in their own collection – and when he flicked through the vinyl, another discovery set him on the path he follows to this day. 'I found this album,' he says. 'It was Eddie Cochran's *Singing For My Baby*.'

The LP sleeve bore three photos of Eddie, and one pictured him holding his orange Gretsch 6120. 'I instantly fell in love with that guitar – and from that moment onwards, I just wanted to be Eddie Cochran.'

> *'Often I preferred the modern bands. It wasn't a '50s thing to me, it was new and exciting'*

Higham is now one of the foremost rockabilly guitar men in the country, playing with ex-Stray Cat Slim Jim Phantom in their band the Katmen, backing rock'n'roll fan Jeff Beck on his *Rock'n'Roll Party* Les Paul tribute album, and even finding mainstream success with his missus, Imelda May, who has become an ambassador for all things rockabilly.

Higham's first guitar wasn't the magical Gretsch 6120 he so desired; it was a Spanish classical. The young Darrel broke out the felt tip pens and drew a G brand, f-holes and a Bigsby on it and posed in front of the mirror. It wasn't until he was 12 or 13 that he actually learned to play. 'My mate, Joe Chapman, seemed to know the intro to every rock'n'roll song in the world. It took me ages to work out that he couldn't play anything more, but it was brilliant because I discovered I had a modicum of natural ability, and I could learn the rest of the song.'

Joe sold him a '60s Strat copy that had 'about a million buttons on it' (nobody, including Joe, knew what any of them did). Later, it was a Satellite semi-acoustic that got Darrel fired up. 'I just loved it,' he grins. 'It was a step towards a Gretsch.'

The rock'n'roll revival of the late '70s and early '80s soon arrived at the village just outside Bedford where Higham grew up, so his musical obsession certainly didn't make him a social outcast. 'Even in the surrounding towns there were a lot of people into rockabilly, dressing the part and going out to the clubs. It became a huge thing.'

By the time Darrel had a driving licence at 17 he was already playing in bands regularly. He would also go to the clubs and hear the new wave of rockabilly bands doing their own take on the songs of the '50s, and that's what really inspired him. 'Very often I would prefer the versions by the modern bands, because those were what I heard first. There were bands on the scene like Dave Philips and the Hot Rod Gang, Restless, the Blue Cats – I would say they were just as influential as the original guys and the bands having chart success. It wasn't a '50s thing to me, it was new and exciting.'

When he turned 19 years old Darrel finally laid his hands on his first Gretsch 6120 – one of the first reissues to hit these shores. 'It was number 40 of the first batch made. When I first saw it I was mesmerised because it was just so beautiful. It cost £1500. In 1989 that was a lot of money, but I managed to cobble it together somehow. As time went by I started realising it was nowhere near the same as the '55 Cochran Gretsch, so I spent years modifying it. I changed the pickups, changed the Bigsby and did a lot of work. The irony is that I think the very last year I had it, it was absolutely spot on.'

Sadly, that Gretsch was stolen from a theatre in Melton Mowbray in 1998. 'Since then I've struggled to find a guitar that I can play as well. That was ➔

Gear

Guitars
Stephen Stern-built Custom Shop Gretsch 6120, Gretsch White Falcon, Gibson Switchmaster, Gibson ES-295, Peavey Rockingham, Kay Thin Twin, Favilla acoustic

Amps
Peavey Delta Blues, Watkins Dominator

Effects
Zoom G2, Danelectro Reel Echo, Marshall Bluesbreaker overdrive, Watkins Copicat tape echo

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Darrel with his 1990s Gibson Custom Shop ES-295 bought because of his love of Scotty Moore's Sun Studio sound

Favilla flavour: Higham's mysterious pawnshop acoustic

the one, the special guitar that all guitarists talk about. I was really gutted... I mean totally distraught. It was like losing a friend. There's often a guitar that comes up on eBay and I look at it and I think, "Could that be it?"'

Darrel's never been a vintage guitar fan: he prefers a brand new instrument every time. 'I don't really like secondhand guitars, as a rule. If I had an original '55 Gretsch I'd probably be afraid to play it and I'd lock it in a bank vault. My whole philosophy is for rockabilly to be modern, and that goes for the gear that I play too. It's all new stuff that's made to look old. I bought a Fender Bassman reissue when they came out in the early '90s, and that was perfect because it was a '50s-looking amp but it was modern and reliable.'

'I don't even like secondhand guitars. If I had a '55 Gretsch I'd probably be afraid to play it'

There were some stompboxes around that offered a semblance of slapback echo, but Higham found he simply had to resort to vintage kit to begin with. 'It took a few years before the technology caught up. Around 1989 I bought a Watkins Copicat, one of the really early ones, but it was very unreliable. These days I use a Danelectro Reel Echo, which I think is a fabulous pedal.'

Just as Higham was coming of age as a player, he found that there was something of a backlash against rockabilly bands. The original '50s records were being reissued and the trend on the scene was for total authenticity – something which didn't quite fit with Darrel's ethos. 'I remember when I first started around '89, we'd driven all the way up to Norwich and this club was full of young kids going crazy. We were thinking, "This is going to be a great gig tonight!" We set up, the DJ announced us, and just about everybody left and went to the bar. They waited for us to finish and then they came back in because they wanted to dance to the records. That didn't just happen once – that happened a lot!'

Darrel and his long-standing band the Enforcers may not have converted the purists, but they made a living on the nostalgia circuit and were able to cut loose on European tours where the crowds were far more open to new ideas. Higham also earned a few pennies when he landed a slot in the West End playing guitar in *Elvis: The Musical* for an eight-month stint in 1996.

'At first, my job was to play the Scotty Moore licks on the '50s Elvis stuff. I borrowed £3000 off the show's director in order to go and buy this early '70s Gibson L5 because I wanted to do the job properly.' The director wanted to incorporate Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran slots in the show so Darrel, albeit briefly, did finally get to be Eddie.

Unfortunately a couple of years after the West End gig his Gretsch was pilfered, and times were becoming hard. Help came in the form of Ken Achard, then managing director of Peavey Europe, who shared a soft spot both for Eddie Cochran and for Gretsch guitars. 'I was going through quite a bad time. I'd had my guitar nicked, I'd blown just about every speaker in my Bassman, and the Enforcers were struggling because we didn't have a decent PA. So I said to Ken, "Well, I'd love to be involved with Peavey, and here's a list as long as your arm of stuff that I need – if you can help me out with any of it, I'd be eternally grateful." Ken, bless him, turned around and said, "Yeah, we can sort all of that. I can't give you a guitar, though, because we don't make anything you'd like."'

Between them Darrel and Ken decided maybe it was time Peavey did. Higham was already living with Imelda, then a jazz club singer, and since his future spouse was also something of an artist, he asked her to draw him a guitar with the neck of a 6120 and the body of a White Falcon. 'I came up with the measurements and sent it off to Ken. One day he called me into the Corby headquarters and he had two prototypes sitting there, a blond and a purple one. He kept the purple one and I took the blond.'

The guitars were not yet the finished article and needed some refining. 'It was a mess. They were all over the place... the back pickup was almost touching the bridge. I took it to a guy called Rob Bond in Bedfordshire who has worked on my guitars for 20 odd years. I said, can you make this playable for me? He put the fixed Bigsby on and the DeArmond at the bridge and the P90 in the neck that I've always had on all my guitars. It played beautifully – I used that for years... until it got stolen in a club in Madrid!'

The Peavey guitar, dubbed the Rockingham, went into production. It did incredibly well and Higham played them exclusively for 10 years. The lighter ➔

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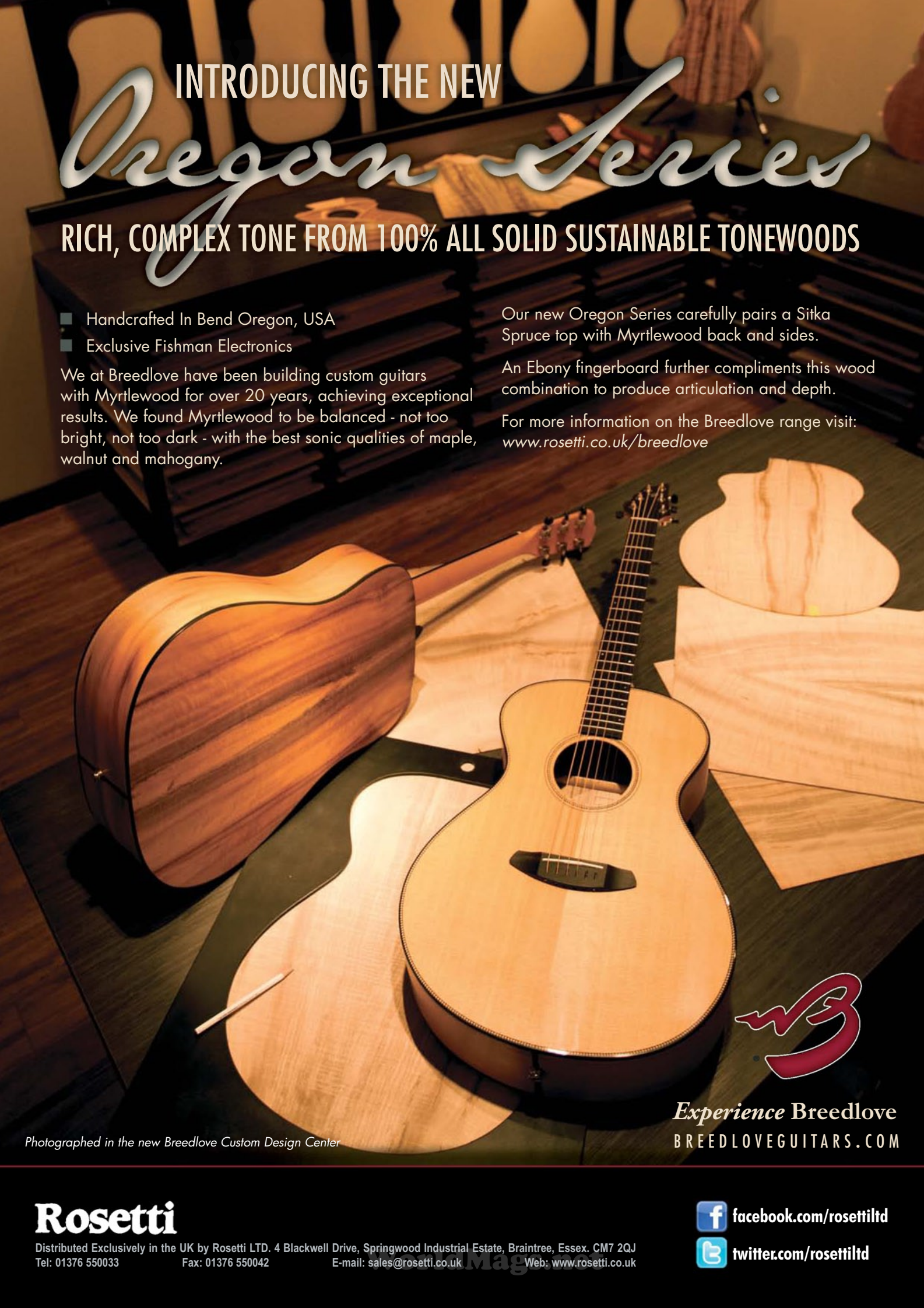

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The collection! Back row: two Peavey Rockinghams, White Falcon, Darrel with Switchmaster, Custom Shop 6120, his first White Falcon, Kay Thin Twin. Front: Flavilla acoustic, Peavey Delta Blues , Dominator, ES-295

Listen up

THE KATMEN
The Katmen Cometh...
(2013)
Rebooted after the 2007 debut, Slim Jim Phantom and Higham achieve their long term ambition of blending roots with rockabilly and dragging it into the 21st century

IMELDA MAY
Love Tattoo
(2008)
The record that made Imelda the nation's darling is an eclectic mix of smoky jazz, rockabilly, big band and pop. A tribute to both May's and Darrel's versatility

purple one pictured can be heard all over Imelda's first three albums and now resides in his studio, while the darker one comes out for Katmen gigs abroad. 'I always looked at them as being a really good, inexpensive basis for anyone that wanted that type of guitar. You can spend a few bob changing the pickups if you want and you'll have really good guitar.'

To complete the Higham formula you could do worse than pick up a Peavey Delta Blues. 'I fell in love with them... I've been using them for 15 years, in the studio and on every gig. The 15" speaker really works with these pickups. It's a big sound, phenomenal! I just can't enthuse about them enough.'

> *'Me and Jeff Beck both like old cars and rockabilly, so we had things in common'*

Imelda May and Darrel may first have crossed guitar devotees' radars when they both appeared on Jeff Beck's 2010 *Rock'n'Roll Party Honoring Les Paul* live album. Darrel had run into Jeff when he was filling in with the Big Town Playboys, who had played on Beck's *Crazy Legs*. Higham also later sat in on a session playing rhythm when Beck ran through his favourite rockabilly tracks. 'After that, I seemed to run into him in the strangest places. I went to see Scotty Moore in London and he was there, and I also bumped into him at the Hemsby rock'n'roll weekender.'

A few years later Imelda began a residency at Ronnie Scott's singing with the house band, and one night Beck turned up with Tony Iommi in tow having been told about a great new singer he simply had to hear. Beck was amazed when he met Darrel at the bar and found out that Imelda was also Mrs Higham, and a friendship was struck that slowly became the basis for the Les Paul Tribute project. 'We'd just hang out. Me and Jeff both love old cars and rockabilly, so we had things in common. Of course, he loved listening to Imelda sing. I don't know of many singers who can go into a studio and knock out five-part harmonies in an hour and a half. She knew all of those songs through her years of singing in the jazz clubs so she could sit there in Jeff's kitchen and say "Oh yeah, I know *How High The Moon*." He couldn't believe his ears.'

While Darrel was out on in the US with Beck's *Rock'n'Roll Party* tour, Gibson – who count Beck as an endorsee – did their best to prise him away from his treasured Gretsches. 'They asked if I would play a Les Paul,' Darrel explains. 'I said I found them a bit clunky, and they've got necks like ironing boards... and they're so heavy! But I said, I'd love an L-5 or something like that. They gave me this Switchmaster, a sunburst with PAFs. I wasn't mad on the PAFs so Rob refinished it in blond and I got these three Alnico 5 staple pickups from Seymour Duncan because I wanted a Scotty Moore sound – he had Alnico pickups on his '54 L-5. It's a fantastic guitar now and the very least I can do is play the thing, so it's become my Katmen live guitar.'

Higham played a Custom Shop Gretsch 6120 built by master luthier Stephen Stern on most of the new Katmen album, *The Katmen Cometh;* he spotted it leaning in Beck's hallway while the great man was mulling over whether to purchase it himself. 'It's been aged, and if you put it next to an original you couldn't really tell the difference. I did mod it so it looked like the Cochran guitar with the P90 and a fixed arm ➔

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Custom Shop 6120 flanked by Darrel's fave White Falcon (right) and his spare (left)

Like most of Higham's guitars his Peavey Rockinghams have been modded with a P90, a DeArmond and a fixed arm Bigsby

Bigsby. This was just before they brought out the Custom Shop Cochran signature model.' He also picked up his White Falcons around the same time; 'I got such a good deal on the first one that it was silly not to buy it. I love the 6120, but I'm a big bloke and it can feel a bit like a ukulele. The Falcon is a bigger guitar but they have big necks and I'm used to the narrow 6120 necks, so I do struggle with them. I still think they're the most beautiful guitars on earth.'

A Dominator amp, a present from Imelda, is a recent acquisition. 'A guy called John Beer has been building them with the blessing of Charlie Watkins. He only makes a few at a time. It's wonderful... too precious to gig, but for the rockabilly session stuff it's perfect.'

The Kay Thin Twin Jimmy Reed reissue was bought in New York while on tour with Beck and was christened live on Jay Leno's *Tonight Show*. 'That's a lovely guitar and it works really well with the Dominator for an authentic sound. It's a very brittle, very toppy and twangy. It's an acquired taste.'

The Katmen: Slim Jim Phantom on drums, Higham on vocals and guitar and Al Gare on bass

Darrel always craved an ES-295 because of the Scotty Moore connection, so he found one on eBay. 'It's a late '90s Custom Shop job – they didn't make many. The Bigsby isn't authentic to Scotty but of course I rely on a Bigsby heavily. It was a trek to go and see it but it was immaculate, so I bought it on the spot.

'I've used .011" strings for years. You can get away with it on short-scale necks but on these big old necks they're like telephone wires, so I set it up for .010"s. I've got .010"s on the Switchmaster because it's such a beast to play.'

The Favilla acoustic was bought from a pawnbroker in the Angel, Islington in London about 10 years ago. 'I worked there very briefly. The guy only wanted a couple of hundred quid. It has a J-200 kind of vibe to it. Judging by the label, it was made in 1973. I don't know if they're rare... it could be a real budget guitar but it plays beautifully, and that's the one I use in the studio.'

Darrel picked up his early '60s Watkins Copicat for old times' sake. 'They do give a really beautiful echo. I've had it serviced by John Beer at Amp-Fix, who made the Dominator. He's a Watkins enthusiast, he knows everything about them. I'd had it for years and not really been able to use it. Now it works perfectly.'

Those who scan the stage for such vintage items at gigs will be disappointed, as Higham's effects mainstay is a budget Zoom G2 multi-FX. 'I've used Zoom going back 10 or 15 years, right to the very early ones. I just use it for a very short reverb...really, just an ambient setting that fattens the sound out. That's pretty much on permanently throughout the entire gig. When I first started working with Imelda it was just the Zoom, the Rockingham and the Delta Blues, and I got everything I needed. A lot of it is in the fingers, it's how you play.'

Over the years Higham has backed up many rockabilly greats with his contemporary guitar rig, and no one has ever had cause to complain about his tone. Sun Records original Billy Lee Riley, Cochran's last backing band the Kelly Four and Shakin' Stevens have all benefitted. 'Because of the fan-boy in me, I've never turned down the chance to work with those originators. You can't put a price on things like that. A year or two ago I got to work with Royce Porter. He made only about half a dozen great tracks back in the day, and then disappeared. For me it's like meeting the Beatles or the Stones. I have to pinch myself.'

For new generations Higham is now becoming considered one of those originators, and budding rockabilly rebels often cite him as one of their main influences. Typically, he plays down his reputation. 'I don't consider myself to be a great guitar player, but I do take what I do very seriously. I love what I do, and I've always found real joy in playing the guitar. I still get that when I'm on stage. I'll never lose it.'

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Chapter & Verse

Conceived around a kitchen table in Sheffield, Martin Simpson's stunning new album *Vagrant Stanzas* sums up the guitarist's journey so far. Interview by **Rik Flynn**

A close listen to Martin Simpson's latest fingerstyle masterpiece *Vagrant Stanzas* is all that is required to understand the breadth of the man's genius. On the face of it, it's just Simpson, an acoustic guitar and a mic or two, but listen a little deeper and you'll discover echoes of every one of the numerous collaborations he's chosen to embrace, every tune that's moved him, and every musical style he's decided to take on.

His dexterity is mind-blowing, there's no questioning that, and his interpretations of classic songs and traditional folk melodies are second to none – but what of that 'other' thing? The profound feeling that shadows every note, that looms in every pause and seems so deeply woven into his playing that it has become second nature? He probably doesn't even notice it's there, but we can't ignore it. It's this otherworldly essence that separates Simpson from his peers, and it's the reason he has a row of BBC Folk Awards lined up on his mantelpiece and almost 30 nominations besides.

The explicit sound of one man and his guitar on *Vagrant Stanzas* is a fine way for Martin to toast his 60th year on Planet Earth, as his skills around the fretboard have been much in demand ever since his first steps onto the folk scene. In his early career he accompanied English singer June Tabor, and since then many eclectic partnerships have taken up a large part of his diary – from fellow members of the folk elite through to experimentation further afield with musicians like Chinese pipa player Wu Man ('absolutely jaw-dropping. Half the time I just wanted to stop playing and just watch!') and Indian slide guru Debashish Bhattacharya ('extraordinary!'). While many guitarists Simpson's age have long since settled into habit, this Scunthorpe-born troubadour remains wonderfully unpredictable.

It was another of Sheffield's many talented residents, Richard Hawley, who played an integral part in the inception of this stripped-back new treasure. 'Richard was in London to present me with a folk award,' Martin begins. 'He got up and said how ridiculous it was when he could have dropped it through my letterbox! At that point he lived about 400 yards away, but then he bought the house next door, so now we're literally neighbours. We get on like a house on fire because we're incredibly enthusiastic about music and we're both mad about guitars.'

The pair met and jammed across the kitchen table, and a plan developed to record some ideas together at Hawley's studio in Sheffield. However, things turned out a little differently. 'We'd been playing and we went into Yellow Arch studio to record,' Martin explains. 'Richard sat and listened and said "You don't need anybody else to be on this record. Just go and do it yourself." So that's what I did.'

More tracks were recorded at the Paul Reed Smith studio in Annapolis, Maryland, with the goal to recreate the atmosphere of those formative moments with the kettle close at hand. 'All the time at the back of my head was this little image that I was playing for Richard over ➔

Gear

Guitars
Stefan Sobell, Martin Simpson Private Stock PRS signature, Gibson Roy Smeck Stage Deluxe, Gibson Premier lap steel and many more!

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Photo: Mike Prior

Martin's main tunings at the moment are CGDGCD, CGCFCE, CGCGCD, drop D and standard

The album blends Simpson's artful way with folk standards – amongst them *Diamond Joe, Waly Waly* and *Blue Eyed Boston Boy* (the two-disc deluxe album offers even more traditional fare including charged versions of *The Green Linnet* and *The Death Of Queen Jane*) – with classics by contemporary writers. Re-imagining music has always been Simpson's strength: 'To me interpretation and arrangement have always been my passion,' he enthuses. 'To be able to take somebody else's song and deliver it in such a way that it briefly becomes yours is fantastic.'

The injustices of the world are explored when he injects a new depth and melody into Leon Rosselson's radically politicised song, *Palaces Of Gold,* and he doesn't make life easy for himself with hefty but downbeat tracks like Cohen's superb *Stranger Song* and Dylan's politically-charged *North Country Blues,* a brutal picture of life in the iron ore towns which reflects the sombre history of much of the North of England, an area so dear to Simpson's heart. All the same, he always seems to manage to expertly re-mould them to make them feel as if it's almost the first time they've been played. Is there a process for these interpretations?

'Basically, I immerse myself in the song,' he ponders. 'So first of all I go back and really listen to it over and over and get it in my head. Then I try and forget it completely and come up with something that feels different. You just internalise the whole thing and then drag it out again.'

There are originals, too – but Simpson is a savage self-critic. 'My writing has taken me a really long time,' he admits. 'I think if you are exposed to the kind of repertoire that I've been exposed to over the years – the best of traditional music and the best of the singer-songwriters – then you'd better be fucking good at writing songs before you wheel them out!' The clutch of originals stand out if nothing else simply for the fact that they don't: they fit so well alongside the rest. *Delta Dreams* tells the story of Simpson's trip to New Orleans in a '55 Chevy to explore the Delta, with US roots musician Spencer Bohren as his guide; elsewhere, in *Jackie And Murphy,* written at the bequest of June Tabor, he tells the heroic tale of John 'Jack' Simpson Kirkpatrick.

"I'm a very slow writer. When June asked me if I would write that song it was a tall order, but I knew it had to be ready to go on the record. It's about a guy born in 1892 in Tyneside who worked with the donkeys on South Shields seafront. He joined the merchant navy and ended up in Australia. When the first world war came, he volunteered in the ambulance corps, then ended up in the Dardanelles as part of a crew of stretcher bearers at the Gallipoli landings. He worked with a donkey and saved 300 men, and was killed after four weeks. A Dickens medal went to the donkey but Jackie didn't get a Victoria Cross as he was nominated for the wrong category of heroism.'

Simpson knew his calling from an early age. 'I was about three or four and heard my mother's 78s

the kitchen table... just little low-level visualisations, and I think it comes over. I wanted it to have immediacy and a sense of performance. Increasingly, that's not what studios offer you. They give you the opportunity to salvage things, to alter and to move. I think what you get is a tamer approach to music. I don't think *Vagrant Stanzas* could be accused of being tame on any level.'

'To take somebody else's song and deliver it so it briefly becomes yours is fantastic'

From teacher to student

Worldly experience and much collaboration has undeniably played a huge part in the formation of Martin Simpson's style, but in a rather more unlikely way, it's teaching others that has enabled him to look inward and truly find his voice.

'When I left England, professional musicians in the guitar world didn't teach because it wasn't cool – it was frowned upon,' he muses. 'However, I started teaching when I was about 17 because I was determined to make my living playing the guitar. The moment I started teaching, I quickly realised that it illuminated what I was doing. I began to understand the whys and wherefores of theory because I had to explain it to other people. I love doing workshops now!'

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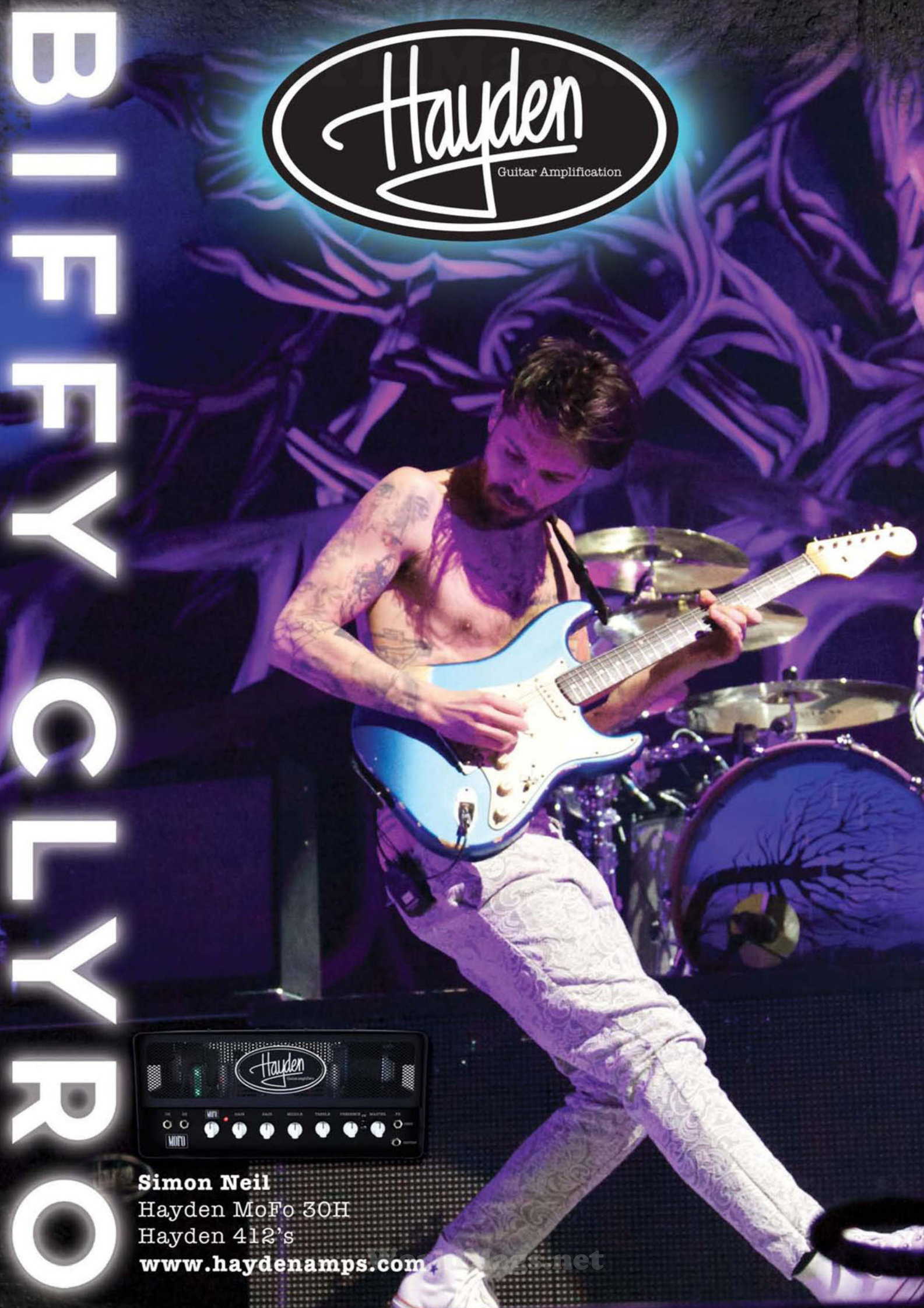
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Simpson's acoustics include his PRS signature, a Gibson Roy Smeck, and a Stefan Sobell

Photo: Elly Lucas

Alongside Martin's PRS is his banjo, a custom beauty by Jason Romero of Horsefly, British Columbia

Listen up

MARTIN SIMPSON
Vagrant Stanzas (2013)
A stunning blend of traditional folk, blues and some gorgeous new interpretations of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen plus highly politicised fare from Leon Rosselson

MARTIN SIMPSON
Prodigal Son (2007)
His most successful album, *Prodigal Son* won Best Album at the BBC Folk Music Awards and features *Never Any Good*, which bagged him another award for Best Original Song

MARTIN SIMPSON
Leaves Of Life (1989)
Simpson made his name on the other side of the Atlantic with this collection of traditional instrumental airs originating from England and Ireland. It's released on the Guitar Artistry series

of Paul Robeson singing negro spirituals and I can remember the way that they made me feel. I suppose that kind of deep melancholy is actually the blues. I just felt it so strongly, and though I didn't know what it was, I knew I wanted it.

'In the next few years my brothers ended up filling the house with music, mostly American jazz and blues. Simultaneously, the English folk scene was kicking off. So on the one hand I had all this American influence and on the other there was Scots, Irish and English traditional music. I begged for an instrument for two years and when I eventually got it, it was Christmas. By the end of Christmas afternoon I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life!'

Fifteen years spent living in America proved to be a profound musical journey of its own. 'To have the opportunity to actually go there and be immersed in the music was fantastic. It was an astonishing adventure because I went there without a gig and within a very short time I was recording for Stefan Grossman's *Guitar Artistry* series. The next thing I had gigs all over the place, and I was working with Henry Grey [Howlin' Wolf's pianist], Jackson Browne and Steve Miller.'

> *'I heard jazz and blues, and at the same time the English folk scene was kicking off'*

Before long, *Leaves Of Life*, a stunning collection of instrumental airs, announced his talents in America. 'Going to the States made me realise how important my roots in traditional music were. *Leaves Of Life* was the first record I made there, and it had some effect on the American guitar scene. It was really funny, because in a sense it's not flash at all, but it just blew people's heads off and established me in that area. Before, I'd accompanied others; suddenly I was finding a solo voice playing instrumental versions of those pieces.'

Simpson has long been an advocate of Stefan Sobell's superb acoustics, but a phone call from a certain Mr Paul Reed Smith led to the signature model that takes centre stage on the album. 'I got a call out of the blue, which is kind of flattering. He was developing a line of acoustics and had Ricky Skaggs, Cody Kilby and Tony McManus onboard, but wanted somebody else and my name came up. He asked me to look at some prototypes and to give him some feedback. I immediately knew that they were going to be good guitars, but the narrow necks didn't feel like a fingerstyle guitar to me. My feedback was mainly about changes in décor and the construction, but mostly getting the dimensions right. For instance Tony McManus' signature model has a neck width of 6oooth of an inch less than mine, but it makes a big difference! When the third one arrived I'd had it out of the box about 15 minutes and the phone rang and this voice said "You're happy, right?" Paul is the most driven individual I've ever worked with... and that's really saying something!'

Martin used all three of his PRS acoustics on the record. 'I play my finished signature on a couple of the tracks, and there's the third prototype too. Then there's another prototype, a Honduras rosewood guitar with virtually no finish on it – we were experimenting with it deliberately to see what it would do. I wanted a consistent feel, and these guitars are what I use on stage all the time. Also, I was recording at the PRS studio, so it made sense!'

Banjos, of course, also make an appearance. 'You know what they say about the banjo?' Martin jokes, unable to resist a time-honoured gag. 'Leave one in a car all day with the windows open and the doors unlocked, and there'll be five more when you get back! Throw one in a skip, and it'll land on an accordion!'

There are more collaborations on the horizon for Simpson including a tour with the Full English band (with Seth Lakeman, Fay Hield, Nancy Kerr, Sam Sweeney, Rob Harbron and Ben Nicholls) that will no doubt take him in yet another new direction. 'You get given the opportunity to do these things and you'd be mad not to, you know,' he says. 'There's always something to be found.'

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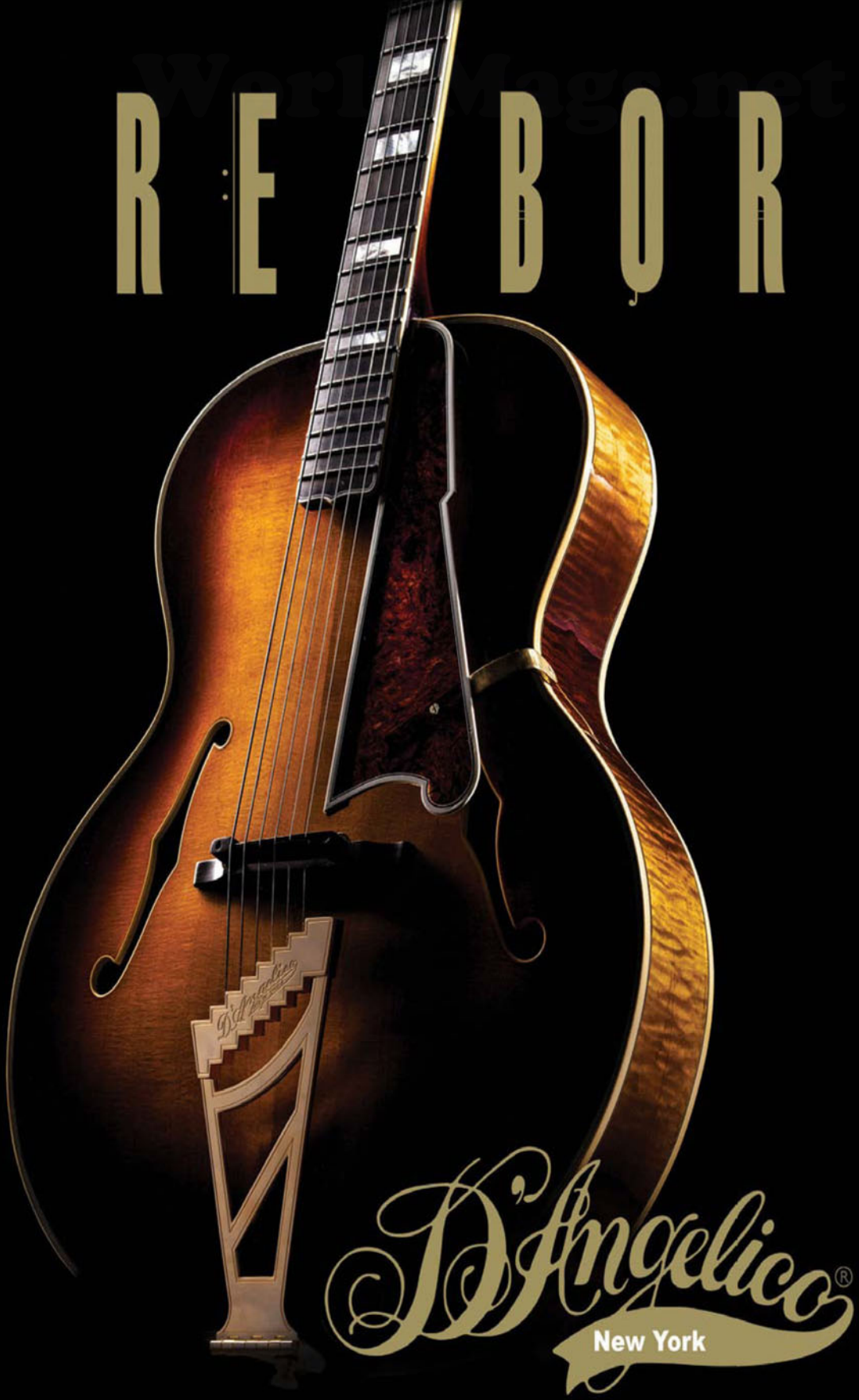

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Photo: Lee-Ann Mueller

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Red Or Dead

As rambunctious and unrepentant as ever, Sammy Hagar returns with a new project positively star-studded with guests from the worlds of rock, blues, and country. Interview by **Steve Bailey**

Sammy Hagar could be forgiven for being just a tad bitter after his much-publicised ousting from the behemoth that is Van Halen back in 2005, but the 'Red Rocker' will just not be bowed. The man exudes enthusiasm and inhabits the term 'a force of nature' like few others on the planet. Any time spent in his company, whether in conversation or when he's up on stage, leaves you fired up, recharged and feeling capable of facing down a stampeding hoard of Red Heads (the collective name applied to devoted Hagar fans).

Financially, clearly Sammy no longer needs to extend himself but he just can't help but carry on roaring onwards, putting out records almost for the thrill. His Chickenfoot project with Joe Satriani, Michael Anthony and Chad Smith (when not otherwise engaged with the Red Hot Chili Peppers) is still ongoing but that's left more than enough time to squeeze in a new solo outing. Sammy believes totally in his new record, entitled *Sammy Hagar And Friends*, and you too will be completely steamrollered by his infectious fervour.

Joyous, wide screen, west coast rock never sounded so effervescent and Hagar takes on a plethora of styles with help from Nancy Wilson, Toby Keith, Taj Mahal and a whole host of others. 'When I make a record now it has to be better or different than anything I've ever done,' Hagar insists. 'This record is eclectic, it's gonna take you on a trip. I touched on all the music I like. You might say, well, there's no jazz swing on there? Well, that's because I DON'T LIKE JAZZ SWING!'

With Neal Schon, Joe Satriani, Bill Kirchen and Hagar stalwart Vic Johnson all providing six-string support, it's good to hear Sammy himself still getting stuck in on fretboard duties – and he's stretching out. *On Ramblin' Gamblin' Man* he even eschews his famed Gibsons and plays a Fender.

'That was a beautiful old Stratocaster. I've got about four or five but I never play 'em. I plug them in and I go "Arrghh, it's too hard to play." It's like a wrestling match for me. I'm a Les Paul guy – Gibson, fat neck, humbuckers all the way, but I wanted to make myself play differently and a Stratocaster does that. It's clean through a little old Fender Concert or a Pro Reverb or something like that. I was really proud of the results.'

Another hitherto unfavoured Fender, a Tele tuned to open E and swathed in tremolo, turns up on *Not Going Down*, a song written for Hagar by Rivals Sons' Jay Buchanan. 'The demo Jay made was so different. I loved the essence of it but I didn't really know where to take it. Bill Church [bass] and Denny Carmassi [drums] came up to my studio and we tuned way down to C# to make it real heavy and grungy. The tuning got pretty flappy so I grabbed an old Tele I had on the wall. It had really thick strings and it was already tuned to an open tuning because Vic [Johnson] had been using it for some country thing we did. I capoed it and plugged in.'

> *'Fenders feel like a wrestling match. I'm a Les Paul guy – Gibson, fat neck, humbuckers'*

Sammy tends to avoid open guitar tunings while singing. 'You have to be real careful. You can easily space out and hit an E shape when you should be playing barre chords. All I really had to do was go "braannnggg" right on the one, but it just felt so good that I started doing Pete Townshend windmills while I was singing! If you listen towards the end you can hear I start hitting it really hard. My engineer kept signalling for me to take it easy, because it was getting kinda nasty. I was digging in because I wanted the song to build. He wanted me to re-do it but I said no way... and that's how the song gets more intense on the ride out.'

Photo: Lee-Ann Mueller

Sammy Hagar with his Chickenfoot-branded Red Rocker Gibson Les Paul

Listen up

SAMMY HAGAR
Sammy Hagar & Friends (2013)
Sammy has a lot of talented friends and they're all here from Satch, Neal Schon, Bill Kirchen to Taj Mahal and many more

SAMMY HAGAR
Sammy Hagar (1977)
His second solo LP, AKA 'The Red Album', which included the song *Red* which would forever lead to Hagar being hailed as The Red Rocker

VAN HALEN
5150 (1986)
Hagar's first album with Van Halen sold six million copies and the title became the name of Eddie Van Halen's signature amp. A slice of rock history

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Sammy's Chickenfoot compadres Satch and Michael Anthony contribute, but this solo album is a very different beast

Hagar has owned his late '50s Gibson lap steel since his Montrose days in the '70s; Ronnie Montrose even played it back then on *Bad Motor Scooter*. Sammy has used it himself on many records, though usually just for background tracks. He does a fine job on *Father Sun*, but is modest about his achievements. 'It has such a mean sound but I've never really soloed this much on it before. I don't play it very well, to be honest. It's work. The guy that played his ass off on the slide on this record was Dave Zirbel.'

Zirbel has carved himself a great reputation as a slide and steel player in the San Francisco Bay Area where Hagar often resides when not enjoying one of his two Hawaiian beach houses. 'Dave plays in a band called the Bad Mother Truckers,' Sammy enthuses. 'They're like a country covers band, but they play the trad tunes in a hard rock style. They're unique, very trippy. He played the Hawaiian guitar on *All You Need Is An Island*, and that sounds like it's straight off the islands, man! And on *Not Going Down* he played that mean Jimmy Page-style shit.'

Zirbel also added some cultured slide on his Dobro to the Hagar-penned *Winding Down* – a duet that found Sammy singing with one of his all-time heroes. 'Me, Sammy Hagar, singing with Taj Mahal! I was so excited because I grew up on the blues, and Taj is one of the guys that turned me on it.'

Hagar was delighted when Taj remarked on the authenticity of the track, especially as it was his first attempt to write a song in open G – remarkably, a tuning to which he was completely new. 'I was reading about it in Keith Richards' book and I called up Joe Satriani that night and I said "Joe, how do you tune to open G?" He explained it to me and I played it all night. I was just having the greatest time with that sound because it makes you play a certain way, and it's limiting as shit! Keith said once he discovered that tuning he wrote a big string of songs because it was so inspiring. Sure enough I picked that guitar up the next morning and I wrote that song right on the spot.'

Hagar has a thing for koa wood acoustics and keeps them around for when inspiration strikes. He has a Breedlove, a 12-string Taylor and two six-string Taylors all with koa back and sides.

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'I used them for *All We Need Is An Island* and for *Father Sun*. I have one Taylor that's all koa wood, and it's so mellow. It doesn't have that jingle jangle but it's got this round tone that is just so rich. There's something real beautiful about it. The koa wood copes really well with the moisture in Hawaii, too.'

Fans of Hagar's 1970s Red Rocker period will remember his old red Gibson Explorer. That guitar has been retired but there is a Gibson Hagar signature Explorer that comes out live for a few numbers, to which he has added a Fernandes Sustainer in the neck. 'My old one isn't roadworthy any more. If that thing got broken on tour it'd break my heart so I keep it hanging in my studio. Plus it's so damn heavy! The new one must have hollow pockets or something, because it's lighter. With the sustainer on there it sustains for days! I like to just grab a note, hit that sustainer and walk around like Hendrix with one hand in the air showboating a little. I use it for *Three Locked Box* and *Bad Motor Scooter* and for when I'm gonna jam. Not for a traditional solo but when we're gonna take a *long* walk in the woods.'

His Chickenfoot-branded signature Les Paul and his 1980s 'Alien' LP carry most of the live show and most of his parts on the new record. The Chickenfoot LP has what Sammy calls a 'Jimmy Page' humbucker in the neck – listed in the specs as a 57 Classic – that he uses for bluesier numbers live. 'I don't use it much but there's something about that front pickup. It's got a lower output – not as many winds or something. It sounds almost like a single coil.'

And pedals? 'Sammy Hagar does not use pedals! Zero. And I do not use wireless. We use a frigging lead and I go straight into the amp, that's the way I play. No whammy bars, none of that. I use a Blackstar amp and a Marshall: that's it. I have the simple Blackstar. You push a button and it goes to overdrive; you push another, it goes to clean. I leave it on overdrive.'

'Sammy Hagar does not use pedals! We use a frigging lead straight into the amp'

Sammy and band are in rehearsals for a show that takes in the new album along with all the greatest moments of his entire career, and he's threatening to bring it to the UK soon. 'We're celebrating the car songs and we're celebrating the Red Rocker. I'm doing four Montrose tunes, and 35 minutes of Van Halen – 'Van Hagar', let's say. That stuff hasn't been played since the 2004 reunion. Dave [Lee Roth] can't sing my songs. He claims he wouldn't, but my opinion is that he can't, okay! So they don't play 'em, and the fans don't get to hear that. We just did two little warm-up shows and, man, when I go into *Why Can't This Be Love* and *Best Of Both Worlds* you can see the audience salivating. Girls crying and hugging their boyfriends. It's awesome! It's time for those songs to be brought back to life. This is going to be a one hell of a show.'

Gear

Guitars

Gibson Les Paul Red Rocker Signature with Chickenfoot branding, 1980s Gibson 'Alien' Les Paul, Gibson Sammy Hagar signature Explorer modded with a Fernandes Sustainer pickup in the neck, '50s Gibson lap steel, Fender Stratocaster, Fender Telecaster, Taylor 12-string and two Taylor six-strings, Breedlove acoustic

Amps

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Faith Healer

Having contributed his furious grooves to the Blockheads, Wilko Johnson and a host of others, that interplanetary hero of the bass guitar Norman Watt-Roy steps out on his own. Interview by **Rik Flynn**

When it comes to bands the world's eyes are almost always front and centre, but it's rightly said that a group is no better than its rhythm section. One case in point is the Blockheads' Norman Watt-Roy, a man who helped forge the band's sound and rapidly became a go-to session guy for the likes of Nick Cave, Madness and the Clash. Although Watt-Roy has the bass chops to back up one-of-a-kind frontmen such as Ian Dury and Wilko Johnson, his was never a mere supporting role. Armed with his 'faith and grace' (cockney rhyming slang for bass), Watt-Roy has done far, far more than simply hold up his end of the bargain for the groups that he's been involved with, and in some cases his ear for melody has helped create huge hit singles. Of course, we all know *Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick* for Ian Dury's inimitable delivery, but take away Watt-Roy's indelible funked-up bass line and it just wouldn't be the same. Many may not know that it was he who came up with the classic three-note hook from Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Relax*, or that it's Norman's ultra-cool low-end loop that provides the foundation for the Clash's cult hit *The Magnificent Seven*.

Prompted by his dearly departed wife Patty and with further encouragement from his producer and fellow Blockhead Gilad Atzmon and friends, Norman decided it was time to take the power back and reclaim what was rightfully his. And he's done so in grand style with his first solo project, *Faith And Grace*, a musical autobiography that confirms his passion, dexterity and an expansive creative mind. 'The man with the face from outer space', as the late, great Ian Dury fondly dubbed him, has finally landed on Planet Earth.

It is perhaps testament to his reputation on the circuit that Israeli sticksman Asaaf Sirkis, one of the top drummers in the world, chose to break off a session with another bass prodigy, in order to appear on the record. 'This album was recorded in two days,' Norman reveals. 'Asaaf came in from Germany to do it. He turned up on Monday morning and I asked him what session he was doing and he said, Jeff Berlin! I couldn't believe he'd interrupted Jeff Berlin for me! He's a frighteningly good drummer. He flies, and I just hang on! If I can surround myself with the best players I can find, then it's just going to make me sound better.'

Faith And Grace is a summary of Watt-Roy's career to date, with tracks from his time with Ian Dury and the Blockheads (*Billericay Dickie*) and Wilko Johnson (*Roxette*) – as well as some of the basslines that he so generously gave away.

'I wanted to make a CD that's unlike anything I've heard before and cross-reference everything that I've been involved with,' Norman explains. 'I'm claiming back my riffs. There's a track called *Norman, Norman* – it's a chant that all the crowd do at Blockheads gigs. In the middle of it I go into *The Magnificent Seven* riff, and I've used the riff from *Relax* too. I didn't get the credit for the writing of the music in those songs. There's a fantastic article Trevor [Horn] did a few years back called *The Making Of Relax*, and he basically tells the whole truth. He actually quotes my name – he says "Norman Watt-Roy came up with the three-note riff that we kept for the chorus."'

> *'I wanted to cross-reference everything I've done. I'm claiming back my riffs'*

Gear

Basses
'72 Fender Precision with added Jazz pickup, Bass Centre 'Blockhead' signature, JKG custom with Sonic Monkey pickups

Amps
Trace Elliot, Ashdown, Ampeg

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Norman with his 'Faith & Grace' bass built by JKG Guitars. He also plays a Bass Centre 'Blockhead' signature

And it didn't end there, for Frankie Goes To Hollywood got their money's worth out of the Blockheads rhythm section. 'Trevor told us to jam while he was getting sounds in the studio,' Norman continues. 'I was doing the riff and he sampled it, turned it round the other way and used it for *Two Tribes*. So he had the second hit record without us having to do a session for it!'

This reclamation continues on another LP track. 'When I put my bassline on *Rhythm Stick* everybody was going, "That makes the song!" but you couldn't copyright a bassline in those days,' he chuckles. 'I wrote *Save It* with Sarah Gillespie, and if you're clever you'll realise it's the bassline from *Rhythm Stick*... but a little different.'

This wonderfully eclectic solo project would never had happened had it not been for Patty, Norman's wife, who tragically passed away unexpectedly. 'I had a couple of instrumentals I wanted to record just for myself, but Gilad told me I should do more – cover one of Ian's songs and one of Wilko's, reclaim my riffs and write some songs over them. I was getting a buzz from it, and my missus told me to go for it. We got so far and then she died very suddenly. I didn't know she was going to die and four days later she was dead, and that put me in a weird place for a couple of years and I couldn't really get into finishing it. It just sat in the shelf for a while until my friends helped me out of my misery and got me to finish it.'

Norman has played in Wilko Johnson's band for some time, so a cover seemed like an obvious option. 'I covered *Roxette*, and I got him to sing it as well. When we played it live a while back he used to tell the story about the girl Roxette and then we'd go into the song, but he stopped doing that a few years ago. I really wanted the story as well, so he goes into that first and then we go into the song. I've added some organ, I've changed the riff a bit and there's some horns on it so it's a different arrangement, but Wilko loves it.'

> *'You want one good bass tone and then 90 per cent of the rest of it is how you play'*

The spirit of Ian Dury is constantly lurking in the background of the album, not only in the re-imagined *Billericay Dickie* but also in the samples that Watt-Roy pulled out from the archives. 'There's a recording somewhere from a gig in Europe where Ian announces the band and it comes to me and he says, "The man with the face from outer space on his faith and grace" – that's where the title came from. I was going through all these tapes of Ian's verbals but I couldn't find it. In the end I used the last gig Ian did with us at the Palladium. At the end of *Billericay Dickie* he says 'Fourteen stone and wringing wet, please say hello to our bass player Norman Watt-Rooooy! It's showtime!''

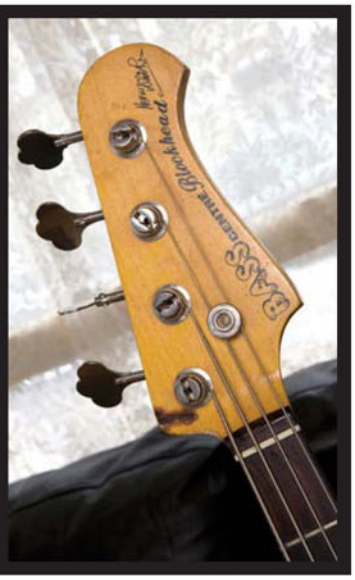
Ian and Wilko also feature on *Papa-chu-pap*. 'I've had weird dreams where I'm on a stage with Wilko and suddenly I'm at a Blockheads gig and it's the same band,' he explains. 'It's like a mixture of all the bands I've played with – a collage of all our gigs. So I tried to do that in *Papa-chu-pap*. It's actually Ian singing 'Papa-chu papa-chu papa-chu pap', and Wilko's on there too.'

The LP is packed with variety, from a sultry version of his hero Jaco Pastorius' *John And Mary* through ➔

Have bass, will travel

Norman Watt-Roy likes to keep things simple when it comes to gear. Though he uses a Bass Centre Blockheads model (pictured right), having sold his '62 Jazz to Radiohead's Colin Greenwood, his main bass is now his deeply worn Fender Precision, with scratchplate removed as a nod to Jaco Pastorius.

'It's a '72 Precision with a maple neck. It's in between the Jazz and the Precision, it's slimmer at the top and it's beautiful. It was £160 and I only had about £40. My missus gave me the other £120 and I bought it, so that's why it's called Patty. I saw Jaco's and I thought "He ain't got a scratchplate, I wanna do that!" I added a Jazz pickup, too. Fenders are like a working man's bass. You want one good bass tone, and then 90 per cent of the rest of it is how you play. You get a good sound and you can play hard, you can play soft – it's all in the way you attack it. It does the job, they travel too.'



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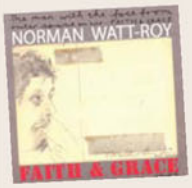
Listen up

NORMAN WATT-ROY
Faith & Grace (2013)
A vibrant and wide-ranging musical montage of everything Watt-Roy can muster and truly unlike anything else. Expect jazz, bebop, R&B, pop, dance beats and re-imagined versions of the Blockheads and Wilko Johnson



IAN DURY
New Boots And Panties (1977)
The chemistry was instant when Norman Watt-Roy first jammed with Charlie Charles, Ian Dury and Chaz Jankel and this classic album was the result. The tracks were mostly written at Dury's flat in Kennington, known affectionately as 'Catshit Mansions'

Norman on stage with long time friend and collaborator Wilko Johnson

Photo: David Coombes

Blockhead-inspired funk, bebop and jazz, pop, R&B, sampled loop-led grooves and a gorgeous instrumental tribute to his late wife via her favourite song, *My Foolish Heart*, made famous by Billy Eckstine. However, the album's centrepiece is, without doubt, the spoken-word *Me, My Bass And I*, that begins with Watt-Roy narrating his early days in India and continues through his life – from 'Paki bashing' on arriving in the UK through his early bands and his love of Jaco up to his eventual success. Although the track was originally intended for Nick Cave, luckily for us the offer was turned down and Norman's narration encapsulates the record with an endearing connection.

> *'Every song on New Boots And Panties had that magic. It was perfect at the time'*

'It was just an instrumental I had at the time and I told Nick to see what he felt for it – I would have loved for him to do a little narration or something over it,' he says. 'He said he loved it, but he couldn't think of anything. I kind of left it open with a few people 'cos I wanted to go to someone who I knew could write. In the end, I did it myself.'

Watt-Roy first picked up the bass thanks to a school friend who was unable to put up with the blisters that came along with the bargain. He served his apprenticeship as part of nine-piece soul band,The Greatest Show On Earth, playing to GIs at US bases in Germany until his band, the Loving Awareness, eventually merged with Kilburn & The High Roads to form Ian Dury And The Blockheads.

The chemistry was instant. 'We arrived at Alvic Studios in Wimbledon to meet Ian and Chaz [Jankel, keyboardist]. Ian had all these pieces of paper and I was reading these words. One of them was *Clever Trevor* and I thought "This is amazing!" I'd never seen anything like it, songs just weren't like that. The guy was a poet. I looked at him and I said "Look, I got to tell you something, your head is so big for your body." He said "I've got polio," and he showed me, and he was all withered. Then we started jamming and it just took off. We knew straight away we wanted to get into the studio and record it properly. Every song on *New Boots And Panties* seemed to have that magic. It was just perfect at the time. When Ian wrote on the back of it, "There's nothing wrong with it", it's really true.'

Stiff Records was soon formed, and legendary hedonistic outings like the *Live Stiffs* tour followed. 'There were five people: Ian, Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe, Larry Wallace and Wreckless Eric. We'd been turned down by everyone, so we figured we'd form our own label. That's when Jake [Riviera] and David Robinson – who used to manage Dr Feelgood – borrowed £500 from Wilko and Lee Brilleaux and formed Stiff. We gave ourselves a deal and decided to do the first tour. It was special 'cos nobody knew what they were doing. We all got on a coach; everyone was on £50 a week. We rotated the bill every night but within the first week everyone knew it was between Elvis and Ian. Nobody wanted to follow them. Within a couple of weeks even Elvis didn't wanna follow us, because we really scored. *Sex And Drugs* became the anthem of the tour.'

It's no wonder Watt-Roy's debut evokes the spirits of his past; those times mean a lot to him and have made him who he is today. But listen to the new album and it's clear the album is not defined by any frontman, but rather by one man – and his trusty faith and grace.

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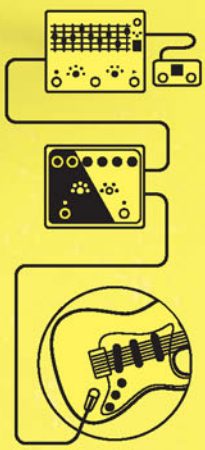

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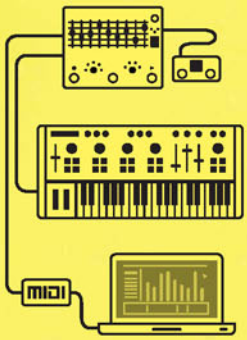

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FENDER
'50s Telecaster Lacquer

What happens when Fender takes a long-running vintage reissue from the Classic Series and sprinkles on a fresh helping of nitro-cellulose fairy dust? Review by **Richard Purvis**

FACTFILE
CLASSIC SERIES '50S TELECASTER LACQUER

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody electric. Made in Mexico**
PRICE **£731 inc. tweed case**

BUILD **Ash body, maple neck, 21-fret maple fingerboard**
ELECTRICS **Vintage-style single-coil pickups, three-way switch, master Volume and Tone**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **White blonde nitro-cellulose only**

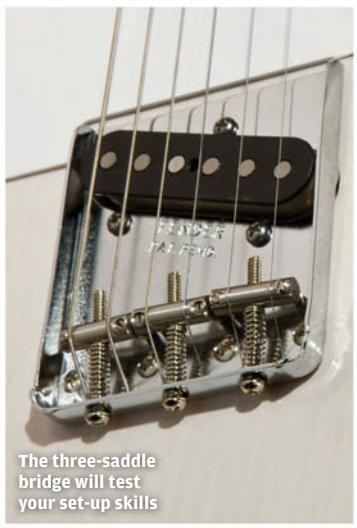
SCALE LENGTH **648mm/25.5"**
NECK WIDTH **Nut 43mm 12th fret 51.5mm**
DEPTH OF NECK **First fret 22.5mm 12th fret 23.5mm**
STRING SPACING **Nut 36mm Bridge 55mm**
ACTION AS SUPPLIED **12th fret treble 1.5mm 12th fret bass 2mm**
WEIGHT **3.3kg/7.3lbs**

CONTACT **Fender GB&I 01342 331700 www.fender.com**

Imagine if the Fender Telecaster only came in one flavour. Forget the ones with humbuckers or semi-hollow bodies or the ones that glow in the dark and speak five languages – we're going back to the mi-1950s, and if you walk into a music shop and ask for a Tele you're going to get a Tele. Ash body, all-maple neck, two single-coil pickups, three saddles. If you're not happy with all that, get a bloody saxophone.

How far the old plank has come. Nowadays, if you include the Custom Shop and Squier, there are around a hundred to choose from. Even if you limit your choice to the traditional spec of solid body and single-coils, you've only narrowed it down to 40-odd. Ash or alder? Maple board or rosewood? Fat neck or thin? Hot pickups or cool? Brass saddles or steel? Jumbo frets or slim? And does the one you want come in aged metallic purpleburst?

Maybe it's time to rip it up and start again. If the Telecaster did still only come in one flavour, it would be a lot like the one you're looking at now. The off-white finish and chromed saddles both point to the '54-'58 period, so this is as close as you'll get to the definitive spec of a mid-'50s Tele in the mid-price bracket – they don't call it the Classic Series for nothing. The ash body is nitro-lacquered, the neck is all-maple and the pickups are alnico, voiced for vintage tone. No surprises – unless you're freaked out by guitars with chunky necks and low-profile frets... but we'll come to that in a minute.

Vintage tuners: standard strings are 10-46 gauge

The three-saddle bridge will test your set-up skills

Nitro white blonde, white guard, steel saddles – this is as close as you'll get to a mid-'50s Tele in the mid-price bracket

That milky semi-transparent nitro finish is called white blonde, and it's quite nice once you get used to it. The post-'54 style white guard is one-ply, and hawk-eyed historians will notice with a smirk of approval that it's held on by only five screws (the other three didn't arrive until 1959). Our review sample is made from three pieces of ash, pretty well matched for grain, and the only aesthetic gripe is that the cool pallor of everything at the body ↦

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Like this? Try this...

Fender
Classic Series '50s Telecaster
The 'poly' finished version is otherwise identical to the Lacquer model in spec, but with more colour options and no tweed case
RRP **£683**

Tokai
TTE50
From the copyists with pedigree, a swamp ash T-type with Japanese pickups and hardware
RRP **£700**

Vintage
V52
Alder-bodied budget option modelled on the classic early-'50s Tele spec, comes in butterscotch with black scratchplate only
RRP **£299**

end makes the well-lacquered neck look rather orangey in comparison.

It's not a super-light guitar but it's not a Les Paul either, and for strumming chords it's a thoroughly agreeable presence on the lap or the strap. But what this resolutely old-fashioned model does not have is the kind of skinny neck that many of us grew up on at the tail-end of the 20th century. This might be an issue if you have the fingers of a nine-year-old, and it might still be an issue if you haven't. The same goes for the frets, which are slinky enough that your fingertips are likely to feel the gently resistant rub of lacquered maple when bending strings. A lot of people will not mind either of these things, but some most certainly will.

Low, skinny frets are authentic and give a love-or-hate feel

Sounds

Straight out of the case, the unplugged voice of our review guitar does not promise much in the way of zing or sustain. It's not the first Mexican Fender to be made of unspectacular-sounding timber, but maybe we shouldn't get too hung up on that – how scrupulous do you think Leo was about selecting the very finest pieces of ash to ensure maximum resonance for the original Telecasters? (Answer: he probably didn't give a monkey's ballbag.)

So along comes a suitably elderly blackface amp, and here's our opportunity to see what the 'vintage-style' pickups can make out of that basic tone. As it turns out, they make something mighty convincing. The bridge pickup has loads of chime and snarl, the neck unit is smooth and jazzy, and the middle setting has all the cluck a cowboy-hatted picker could wish for. All three sounds are rich and well-balanced; if the aim was to nail the classic tone of the guitar that shaped pop music, Fender has hit that nail somewhere very close to the head.

The bridge pickup has chime and snarl and the middle setting has all the cluck a cowboy-hatted picker could wish for

The body's basecoat and topcoat are both nitro: with no UV inhibitors it should fade nicely

Slam on the overdrive and your right hand will be instinctively digging in to draw out every decibel of aggression; it can get hairy on the bridge pickup, but rolling off a slight touch of treble to soften the spikes is easy, and you don't lose anything important with it. And while the Telecaster has always been about plug-and-play, this one's volume and tone controls work perfectly well if you do want to use them – no sudden drop-offs and no crackling pots, at least not on our review instrument.

We ought to just mention those barrel saddles – a source of intonation issues ever since people started playing with an unwound G, but in this case also responsible for another teensy-weensy quibble. Because the Classic Series '50s Telecaster has a purist-pleasingly tight fretboard radius (7.25"), the two outer saddles have to be set quite wonky to follow the camber; and because they're not notched, there's nothing to stop the strings slipping down towards the outer grub screws while you play. So the string spacing when you start playing is 55mm... but by the time you finish it might be a somewhat uneven 56.

Verdict

What do you need to know? Clean, it sounds like a Telecaster; crunchy, it sounds like a Telecaster; distorted, it sounds like a Telecaster. Dipped in treacle, set on fire and strapped to the back of a dolphin, it probably *still* sounds like a Telecaster... but we're not allowed to do that any more. When it comes to the neck, the picture is not so clear – there's only one person who knows whether this combination of chubby profile, lacquered board, old-fashioned radius and low frets is something you'll get along with, and that's you. To be perfectly honest I had a certain amount of difficulty wrestling with this guitar, but a responsible reviewer has to recognise that other players may feel very differently, so that playability score of 16/20 is something of a compromise. Of course, if you don't yet know what your ideal neck is, that's all the more reason to rush out and try one of these cuties today. At the worst, you'll be able to eliminate it from your enquiries; at best, you'll come home with a more than decent and very reasonably priced Telecaster.

FINAL SCORE

CLASSIC SERIES '50S TELECASTER	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**84%**

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HAGSTROM
Metropolis-C

With a dollop of '70s charm and a dash of Swedish glamour, Hagstrom's latest twin pickup solidbody makes a bid for the contents of your wallet. Review by **Huw Price**

If the truth be told, you might say the Metropolis-C is a bit of a mash-up. With its off-white paint job it looks a bit like a Supro with some single-cut Gibson Melody Maker and a touch of Les Paul Special thrown in. The tunomatic-style bridge and tailpiece combined with the black plastic Strat-type knobs and switchtip does make us wonder if the Swedish designers indulged in a bit of 'pick and mix' while happily leafing through the Chinese factory's parts catalogue. Still, it does look pretty cool.

At least the bolt-on maple neck is all Hagstrom. The fingerboard is made from a material called Resinator, which has long been a feature of Hagstrom guitars. It's described as 'a homogeneous wood composite that maintains a strong fundamental harmonic and eliminates wolf tones. It offers the articulate sound of high quality ebony but with more consistency and durability.' Although Resinator may not occur in nature, you'd be hard pressed (no pun intended) to tell it's not a very high quality slab of ebony. It has a uniformly black appearance and feels like very well sanded and nicely buffed piece of wood. The pearl dot inlays look the part, and the jumbo frets are dressed to kill. It's very fine workmanship with no visible fret ends.

Bolt-on maple neck and a lightweight empress body

Hagstrom's usual pizazz is well in evidence

With its off-white paint the Metropolis-C looks like a Supro with some Melody Maker and Les Paul Special thrown in

Beneath the board is Hagstrom's patented H-Expander truss rod, which provides tension at both ends and runs the entire length of the neck. It's made from a rigid, lightweight alloy, and Hagstrom claims that it 'allows for a very low action and thin neck, two factors that were instrumental in earning Hagstrom its reputation as the world's fastest playing guitar'. What's more, the H-Expander is said to provide extra sustain and sharper attack. ➔

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FACTFILE
HAGSTROM METROPOLIS-C

DESCRIPTION
Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Indonesia
PRICE **£419**

BUILD **Solid empress single-cut body with bolt-on 22-fret maple neck, Resinator fingerboard, tunomatic bridge and tailpiece, diecast tuners**
ELECTRICS **Two Hagstrom 58'C humbucking pickups, three-way switch, volume and tone controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Italian red, black, cream**

SCALE LENGTH
648mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 19mm
12th fret 21mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 51mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **3.6kg/7.9lbs**

CONTACT **Rosetti UK**
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Freshly-tweaked Mexican-made JM with alder body and rosewood board, 22 frets, a humbucker at the bridge and Jazzmaster pickup at the neck, three-way switch, vibrato with Adjusto-Matic bridge, and cool amp knobs
RRP **£694.80**

Charvel
Desolation Skatecaster SK1-FR BK
A very moody monochrome offset rocker with a bound flamed maple top, pearl markers on a rosewood board, 24 jumbo frets, one EMG 81 and one EMG 85 pickup, one volume knob, a three-way toggle, locking tuners and a Floyd Rose
RRP **£742**

Framus
Hollywood Double Cut
Convincing reissue of a 1958 model with two single-coil pickups, cream-bound semi-hollow plywood construction, mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard and 21 frets. It's a real European flashback
RRP **£769**

The Metropolis-C is available with two single coil pickups, but the version we're reviewing has two Custom 58'C humbuckers with open top metal covers. The control layout couldn't be simpler, with a three-way selector switch combining with master volume and tone. Other appointments include a black Graph Tech Tusq nut and 15:1 diecast tuners with stepped art deco-style buttons. The tuners work well but the mass they add at the headstock causes a small degree of neck heaviness because the empress body is so light.

Empress is another name for paulownia; a high quality, extremely lightweight hardwood that's native to China. Traditionally used to make Japanese kotos, it's becoming popular with guitar companies. Apparently it's also the fastest-growing hardwood species in the world, taking only six years or so until it's ready to harvest. Mahogany takes around 35 years, so empress is now being used in reforestation projects.

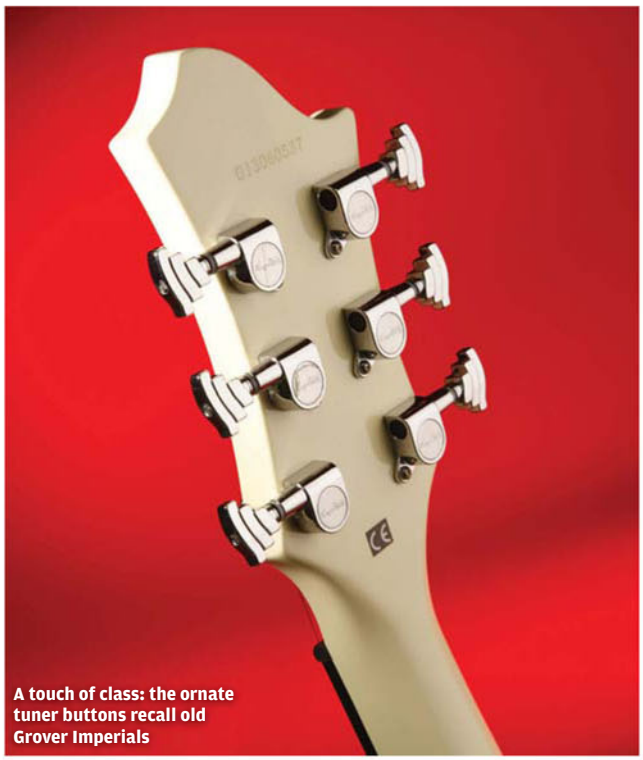
The 59'C humbuckers are borrowed from the Hagstrom Viking Baritone

Sounds

Acoustically the Metropolis-C has a loud and sprangy tone with plenty of sustain, but it's not as deep or warm as an all-mahogany guitar with a set neck. The neck's slim C profile feels comfortable and the 15" fingerboard radius enhances the speediness. Although wide, the fretwire has a very well-defined crown that give notes a crisp edge and allows you to get under the strings for easier bends and better vibrato control.

Despite its two humbuckers the Metropolis-C doesn't dish up the full frequency assault and low-end thump of a Les Paul. This guitar is more about strong, forward mids with clear treble.

The Metropolis-C is all about strong mids and clear trebles, while with overdrive it's a growling, punky affair


A touch of class: the ornate tuner buttons recall old Grover Imperials

These pickups couldn't be described as dark-sounding, and if your amp can deliver some extended treble you can get the Metropolis-C to chime.

Humbuckers can sometimes sound bland in clean mode, but the Metropolis-C has plenty of character. The bridge pickup sounds precise and articulate, with notes gelling together nicely. You can even dial in a wiry top end, and there's barely a trace of the nasal honk that limits the ability of some bridge humbuckers to produce usable clean tones. The neck pickup has just as much treble as the bridge but the tone has extra fullness, especially through the midrange. Single notes have a rounder, more singing quality and the wound strings retain their clarity particularly well.

The middle position is our favourite setting of all. The sound is an amalgam of both pickups, but a hint of phasey midrange scoop adds character and it works best for arpeggios and fingerstyle playing. We like the way that the sound stays bright and clear when the volume control is rolled back, and the tone knob has a very gradual response that remains practical throughout its range. However, there's some noise towards the fully rolled-back position.

In overdrive mode the Metropolis-C turns into a bit of a beast. This isn't a smooth blues or rock guitar – it's more of a raw, growling, punky affair. Clarity is retained at high gain and the Metropolis-C retains definition and dynamic punch through fuzzboxes.

Verdict

The Hagstrom Metropolis-C is a nicely-made guitar that plays well and stays in tune. The double humbucker with a tunomatic layout is fairly generic and it's hardly surprising that the sound is fairly generic too, but having said that it does have a clear and even response that cuts through high-gain tones and has no problems when it comes to driving chains of effects. There's also plenty of upgrade potential if you're that way inclined, and this guitar is certainly good enough to use as a starting point for various modifications; for instance, some better-looking knobs, more interesting pickups and maybe even a Bigsby vibrato would surely lift this Hagstrom to another level.

FINAL SCORE

HAGSTROM METROPOLIS-C	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**15**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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ORANGE
CR60 combo

Tranny versions of flagship valve amps are a time-honoured way to spread your name into the lower leagues. Can Orange's latest 60-watter capture the impact of the originals? Review by **Richard Purvis**

The only trouble with those big, high-powered Orange amps is that they hurt your wallet and then they hurt your back. Here, though, is a carrot-coloured combo that kicks out a full 60W yet promises to be as portable as it is affordable. It doesn't look particularly different to any of the other Orange models of similar wattage, but tip back your deerstalker and you'll find a couple of clues to how they've pulled off this most miraculous of economies. There's no standby switch, and there's no ventilation for the valves. And that can only mean... there are no valves.

Taking the all-tube Rockerverb as its starting point, Orange claims to have spent several years toiling over the challenge of producing a solid-state amp that can match the real thing for tone. No need to ask why – as we've already established, valve amps tend to be expensive and heavy, and the CR60 is neither. Its launch means Orange is satisfied that the quest is complete; all that remains to be seen now is whether *Guitar & Bass* agrees.

We should first elaborate on just how closely this budget alternative resembles its more pricey brothers. The cabinet is a fortress of 18mm plywood; the control panel, complete with bent metal protectors at each end, has the usual black knobs, eccentric graphics and ginger jewel light, and there's that crazy old badge, bang in the middle of the familiar basketweave grille cloth. This amp is fairly compact even for a 1x12", and the chassis itself weighs less than most because there's not much in there aside from a few PCBs, one medium-sized mains transformer and a small heat-sink, all of which combines to make this a genuine one-handed slinger... over short distances at least.

Extension speaker outs, channel and reverb footswitching and an FX loop

Orange claims to have spent several years toiling to produce a solid-state amp that can match the real thing

Features-wise all the Orange favourites are here, plus one surprising extra. The clean channel has Volume and a two-band EQ, while the dirty has an added Mids knob and level controls for both input Gain and output Volume. There's also Master volume, naturally, and a Reverb control – but don't go looking for a spring tank at the bottom of the cab. A tiny three-way toggle switch offering Plate, Hall or Spring reveals that this is a digital ➔

FACTFILE
ORANGE CR60

DESCRIPTION **Solid-state 60W combo with two channels and one 12" Orange speaker. Made in China**
PRICE **£349**

CONTROL PANEL **Guitar input; Clean channel Volume, Bass and Treble; Dirty channel Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble and Volume; Reverb control with Plate/Hall/Spring selector switch, Master volume; Clean/Dirty and On/Off switches**
BACK PANEL **Two 16 ohm speaker outputs; footswitch inputs for reverb on/off and channel switching (footswitch not included); FX loop send and return**

DIMENSIONS **55cm wide, 45cm high, 29cm deep**
WEIGHT **20kg/45lbs**

CONTACT **Orange Amps 020 8905 2828 www.orangeamps.com**

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Custom Shop 50 head
The CR60's all-valve, hand-wired, English-made godfather; it sounds three times as good, but then it costs five times as much
RRP **£1699**

Hiwatt
Maxwatt G100R
Brit-voiced 1x12" combo that won a *Guitar & Bass* Award for its uncannily valve-like tones
RRP **£380**

Shere Sound
RIF Firefly
Made in the UK, this 45W 1x12" combo is a solid-state amplifier that sets out to topple the whole 'valves sound better' orthodoxy
RRP **£695**

Large Gain and Volume knobs and smaller EQ knobs assist on-the-fly tweaks

emulation: less weight, less cost, more versatility. On the bottom of the chassis you'll find two footswitch inputs – for channel-switching and bypassing the reverb – and an FX loop. The speaker is an Orange-branded unit rated for 60W.

There are no complaints to be made about the quality of the build and finish – and it's quite fitting that most of Orange's amps, including this one, are now made in the PRC. Did you know that China was the first country to cultivate oranges, and that nowadays it produces around five million tonnes of them every year? Wikipedia doesn't specify whether that includes the amps.

In Use

Flick the standby switch and go for a wee while the tubes warm up? Not this time – you'll just have to hold it in. The CR60 scores its first points with a super-low noise floor that really does beg the 'Is this thing on?' question. Starting on the clean channel with all levels safely shy of 12 o'clock, the tone is clear and full, but a bit one-dimensional – which, if we're honest, is true of many British amps at distortion-free settings, even all-valve ones. Cranking the Master doesn't make much difference in this case, but it's a solid enough base for those players who only really care about their overdriven moments. And, after all, the story of Brit amplification is the story of rock, not country hoedowns... not that we need to leap to the dirty channel just yet.

Crunchy edges start to appear as soon as you creep into the top half of the Volume dial, and that little bit of roughness is all the amp needs to wake up. Nudge it past three o'clock and you've really arrived in crunch town, even with single-coils. It sounds very much like the classic Orange voice – and it doesn't sound solid-state. The EQ controls are extremely effective and musical, allowing easy compensation for pickups that are either on the shrill side or prone to bloominess.

Still we hold back from the dirty channel, because we haven't tried the reverb yet, and this might just help to liven up the clean tone. All three types are impressively lifelike, though Hall and Spring are both quite dense and surprisingly long in the decay, even at low levels. Plate is more light and airy, and maybe less likely to swamp out chord work. Note that the reverb cannot be turned on and off on the amp, only by footswitch (which is not included); the effect does at least disappear tidily when turned to zero.

Another thing the CR60 lacks is a light to tell you which channel you're on – but you're really not going to need it. The dirty channel is intended to mimic a valve amp with four preamp gain stages and it's every bit as powerful as that suggests. You'll need to keep it fairly loud, though – with both volume controls below halfway it sounds just as flat as the clean channel at similar levels. Setting Master, channel Volume and Gain to get a good match for the clean tone takes a bit of juggling.

Gain at 10 o'clock gives us a nice vintage crunch, picking up just a little further up the dirt road than the other channel left off, with a cutting upper-mids presence and just a speck less top-end.

Just after halfway is where the really heavy stuff begins to kick in, and again, whether you're slamming huge chords or scaring pigeons off the roof with howling lead lines, it's a strikingly close approximation of the classic Orange voice – though, it must be said, without any flattering valve compression.

Having the Mids control on this channel offers a welcome added dimension of sound-sculpting: pushing it adds vintage British clonk, and backing it right down pulls the sound gently in the direction of America.

The dirty channel gives a strikingly close approximation of the classic Orange voice but without any valve compression

Onboard digital reverb comes in three different flavours

Verdict

This amp has its limitations – the clean tones lack depth while the overdriven channel can be coarse, and there's a boxy element that might have more to do with the small cab and own-brand speaker than anything going on inside the chassis. But would you guess from a blind test that it was solid-state? Not necessarily – and you certainly wouldn't guess that it only costs £349.

FINAL SCORE

ORANGE CR60 COMBO	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**15**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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BLACKSTAR

LT Effects Pedals

Big noise and righteous filth for around half a hundred quid sounds like a stonking deal, and this amp maker's new compact effects range ticks a lot of boxes. Review by **Huw Price**

Blackstar's HT series of pedals – large, formidable units with special diecast casings and full-voltage onboard valves – has been a big success. However, if you want that HT tone and response but you haven't got enough room on your pedalboard or money in the bank, the new LT Series may be the solution.

Although the footprint of each pedal is fairly standard, to Blackstar's credit the boxes retain the distinctive HT look with their chamfered edges. The finishes are matt with matching dulled-down control knobs. You can use a regular 9v centre negative supply or battery power, and every pedal features buffered bypass with silent switching.

The LT Series pedals feel very solid and properly made, with a build style that closely resembles the old Ibanez and current Maxon pedals (time has proven how durable those are, so let's hope these follow suit). The LTs even have a similar rubber anti-slip layer on the base plates. This can create difficulties when you're trying to attach velcro for pedalboard mounting, but the simple solution is to flip the baseplates over, screw them back down and attach your velcro to the exposed medal on the underside surface.

Fans of Blackstar's ISF circuitry will be pleased to see it used on the DT-Dist and DT-Dual pedals. The overdrive and distortion pedals also feature a clipping circuit that morphs from asymmetrical to symmetrical as gain increases – something designed to replicate the responses of the two triode stages in Blackstar's HT pedals and amps.

The LT pedals feel very solid and properly made and two of them come with Blackstar's ISF tone circuitry

LT-Boost

Starting with a transparency test, the closest we can get to the bypassed tone was with Bass set at around half-past one, Treble at two and Gain around halfway. The tone controls seem to interact with gain and output levels, so it's a tricky balancing act. Total transparency isn't on the cards because the LT-Boost adds some flavour of its own – a bit of extra beef in the mids with a touch more harmonic complexity.

Cranking up Gain eases the front end of our test amp into a smooth overdrive. Some boosts provoke a degree of ragged edginess when the amp is hit harder, but the LT-Boost integrates seamlessly with the amp's natural tone.

The tone controls are mostly about fine adjustments. Bass can add weight or tighten up loose lows. With Treble fully rolled back there's still definition, but rolling back to around 10 o'clock with Gain about three quarters of the way up allows the LT-Boost to combine with an amp to create a creamy overdrive. Set your amp for sparkly clean and kick in the LT-Boost for ↦

FINAL SCORE

LT-BOOST	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**17**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**20**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

FINAL SCORE

LT-DRIVE	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**20**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

FACTFILE
LT-BOOST

SPECS **Buffered bypass boost pedal. Made in China**
CONTROLS **Gain, Bass and Treble**
PRICE **£49**

CONTACT **Blackstar Amps 01604 652 844 www.blackstaramps.co.uk**

FACTFILE
LT-DRIVE

SPECS **Buffered bypass boost pedal. Made in China**
CONTROLS **Gain, Bass and Tone**
PRICE **£49**

CONTACT **Blackstar Amps 01604 652 844 www.blackstaramps.co.uk**

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FACTFILE
LT-DIST

SPECS **Buffered bypass distortion pedal. Made in China**
CONTROLS **Gain, Level, ISF and Tone**
PRICE **£69**

CONTACT **Blackstar Amps 01604 652 844 www.blackstaramps.co.uk**

FACTFILE
LT-DUAL

SPECS **Buffered bypass distortion pedal. Made in China**
CONTROLS **Channel 1 Gain, Channel 1 Level, Channel 2 Gain, Channel 2 Level, ISF**
PRICE **£99**

CONTACT **Blackstar Amps 01604 652 844 www.blackstaramps.co.uk**

Like this? Try this...

Joyo
Roll Boost, Vintage Drive, Ultimate Drive
None of this cheerful low-budget range have anything like Blackstar's ISF feature but these various boosts, drives and distortions do the job okay
RRP **£29.95-£37.95**

Boss
BD-2 Blues Driver, OS-2 OD/Distortion
You'd be astonished at how many pros use humble non-boutique Boss overdrives and distortions. Tough, reliable and proven
RRP **£79**

Marshall
BB-2 Bluesbreaker, GV-2 Guv'nor Plus
The 1990s look to live on with Marshall's shiny and familiar floor-dwellers but some tweaks have been made and they're always worth a try
RRP **£55**

chunkier-sounding power chords or lead tones with extra thickness.

LT-Drive

The LT-Drive has a massive gain range, but it's also capable of performing as a high quality clean boost. For near tonal neutrality the Tone control is best set at around 10 o'clock, with Gain just above minimum and Level set to taste.

We fired the LT-Drive up against an original Ibanez TS-9 Tubescreamer for reference. Gain set around halfway on the DT-Drive equates to full gain on the TS-9. Both pedals have that thick, chewy midrange, but the midrange hump isn't as noticeable with the DT-Drive because the bass is less rolled off. The TS-9 is a little sweeter, while the DT-Drive has a clearer tone with better definition.

At the other extreme the LT-Drive dishes up some very heavy overdrive tones with smooth, effortless sustain and a pleasing degree of note bloom for soloing. As gain levels increase the midrange becomes fatter and smoother. The dynamic response also changes as compression increases, but the DT-Drive manages to retain clarity and note definition. It's a raunchy and recognisable tone that will suit blues and classic rock players and works well with both single coils and humbuckers.

LT-Dist

Our minor gripe about the LT-Dist is that nothing of much interest happens below the quarter way up point on the Gain control. You can get a clean boost, but the underlying tone is a bit thin and ragged compared to the DT-Drive. Fortunately, things get a lot more interesting from that point onwards.

Distortion is a sort of hinterland between overdrive and fuzz. Even at cleaner settings the DT-Dist has little in common with blues-friendly amp-simulating overdrive pedals. The tone has a rawer edge with extra bite and pick attack along with a more modern vibe. We enjoyed it with single coils, but on balance it was a better match with the fatter and darker tones of humbuckers.

The DT-Drive can get massively distorted but it does stop short of fuzz. The influence of the ISF control becomes more profound as gain levels increase; it's a signature feature of Blackstar amps, essentially shifting the midrange response from a fat UK tone through to the heavily scooped tones of modern high-gain US amps.

Once again the midrange thickens up along with gain, so dialing the ISF control towards the US side helps to maintain note definition. This is particularly effective when the DT-Dist is being used for crunchy rhythm tones and soloing. It also enables you to maintain pick attack without having to crank the tone control up too high.

The LT-Drive dishes up a range of raunchy, recognisable overdrives that will suit blues and classic rock players

LT-Dual

Having read Blackstar's website we had expected the LT-Dual to be a two-for-one combination of the LT-Drive and the LT-Dist. We connected all three pedals in line and it quickly became apparent that Channel 1 on the HT-Dual is much closer to the LT-Dist than the LT-Drive. Also, the LT-Dual's second channel sounds almost identical to its first channel when the controls are set the same. Since the LT-Dist is such a versatile distortion pedal, having two pairs of Level and Gain controls allows you to exploit its full range in a practical and simple way – but there's a degree of compromise because both channels go through the same ISF and Tone controls.

There's not much more to say that hasn't been covered by our LT-Dist review, but the LT-Dual does seem to have a slight edge in clarity and scale. It also seems less compressed and more exciting. This may be attributable to battery age, but it might be worth comparing these two yourself if you are interested in buying one or the other.

Verdict

Any criticisms we can make are minor. The LT-Boost compresses the signal, and the compression becomes more apparent as you increase gain; this provides a smooth-sounding boost with effective tone shaping at the expense of some touch response. The LT-Drive and LT-Dist impress and if you really like the LT-Dist, you may decide that paying an extra £40 or so for two LT-Dist pedals rather than an LT-Dual may be worth it for the extra versatility. It's a surprise that Blackstar has priced these so low, the build and sound quality match anything at the price, so we expect them to sell by the bucketload.

FINAL SCORE

LT- DIST	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**18**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**19**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

FINAL SCORE

LT- DUAL	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**19**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

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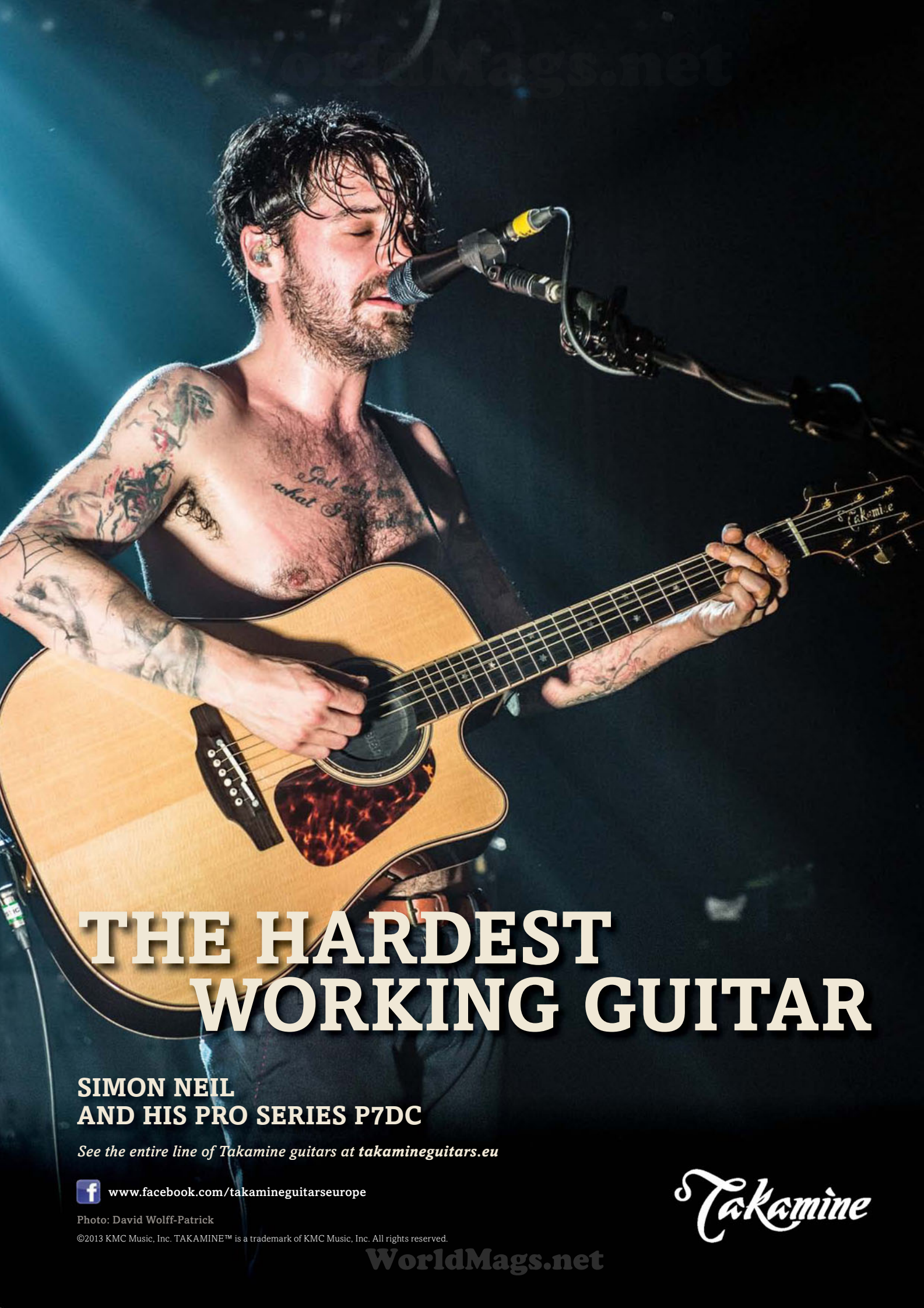

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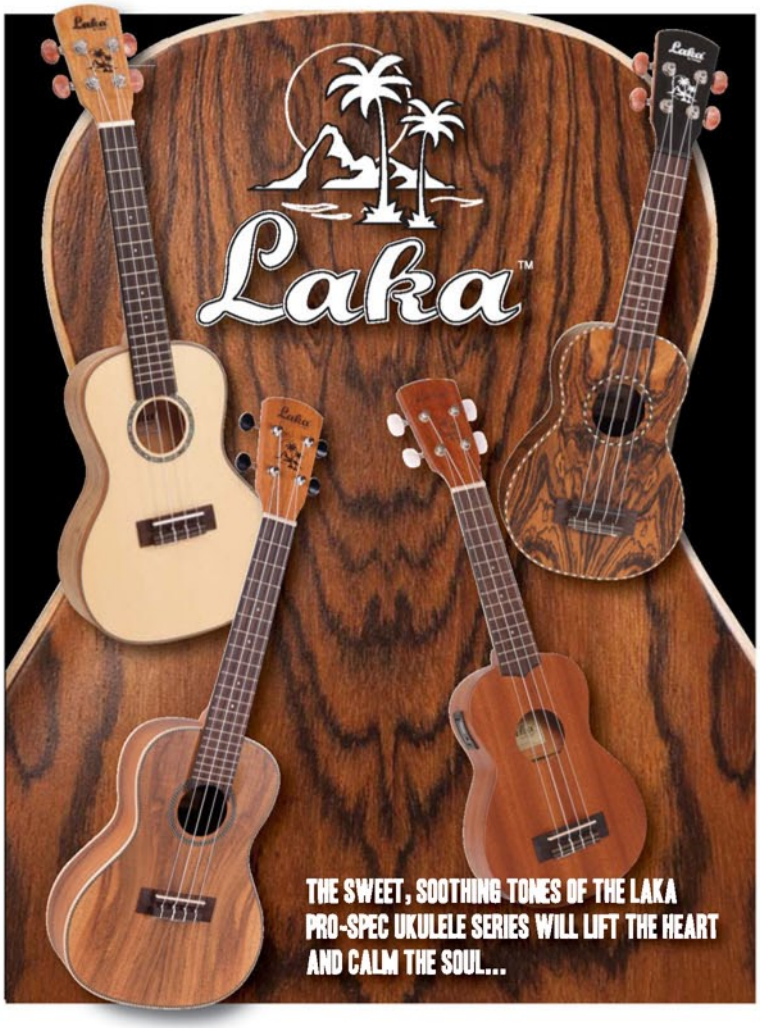

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PIGTRONIX
Quantum Time Modulator Pedal

There's always a buzz at *Guitar & Bass* when a new Pigtronix pedal arrives: we're huge fans of its creations, the names always make us smile, and we immediately think of bacon. Mmm, bacon. Review by **Martyn Casserly**

The latest offering from New York company Pigtronix is the Quantum Time Modulator (see what we mean about the names?) which is a hybrid pedal combining chorus and vibrato, with plenty of cleverness going on inside the innocent-looking and attractively-finished metal case. Three knobs and a microswitch are the only controls available, but between them they serve to fashion a versatile and surprisingly useful sonic palette. Pigtronix goes to great lengths to point out the 'all analog, dual bucket brigade time-stretching device with dual modulation sources' that lies at the heart of the unit, but thankfully the pedal is a lot simpler to use than it is to explain.

The left dial, Sensitivity, controls – as you might expect – how responsive the pedal is to your playing dynamics. Over on the right is the Speed dial which manages the LFO settings, moving the tone from slow atmospheric warblings right up to a space-age chimey vibrato that might not appear often in your set, but will certainly add a bit of colour. The key control, though, is the Source dial, which allows you to blend from the LFO or Envelope side of the effects wagon. Essentially, if you turn to the left you get a subtle thickening of the tone with a more gentle modulation; turn to the right, and it's wobble city. Flicking the microswitch to Chorus adds an affected delay line to your clean signal, while Vibrato removes the clean line and gives you the pure effect.

Sounds

Chorus pedals did a lot of damage in the '80s, with many of us still receiving therapy for the psychological trauma endured. Thankfully the QTM avoids the sterile, cheesy tones of those times: instead, it has a distinctly indie feel. With a little experimenting you can move from *Message In A Bottle* tones (Andy Summers actually uses Pigtronix pedals now), through to darker *Come As You Are* echoes, up to psychedelic lead lines that shimmer and detune themselves on the fly. Great stuff! This pedal is musical, pushing you on to try new licks that harness the power of the moody sonic landscapes.

Verdict

The Quantum Time Modulator is a superb little pedal, and the classy tones and responsive controls make it one you just keep coming back to. At its more sedate settings the unit adds body and a touch of mysterious flavour to a straight tone which would make any indie, rock, metal or blues player instantly sound more interesting. The wilder side might be too much for many, but for those who want to experiment with textured drone notes or avant garde lead lines, the QTM would prove a fascinating inspiration. Pigtronix does it again, as we expected – and now we're off to find a frying pan. Bacon.

FINAL SCORE	
PIGTRONIX QUANTUM TIME MODULATOR	
Build quality	**19**/20
Versatility	**18**/20
Sound	**19**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

FACTFILE

PIGTRONIX QUANTUM TIME MODULATOR PEDAL

DESCRIPTION **Chorus/Vibrato true bypass pedal. Made in USA**
PRICE **£159**

CONTROLS **Sensitivity, Source, Speed. Chorus/Vibrato microswitch selector. 18V power input (power supply included)**

CONTACT **Musicpsych**
0207 607 6005
www.pigtronix.com

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Mind Bender
Another bucket brigade unit which combines a chorus and vibrato effect into one pedal. Tough, smart, and rather gorgeous
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The Clone Theory
EHX is always worth a look when modulation pedals are on your list, and this chorus/vibrato combo is no exception. Great tones and a decent price from Pigtronix's New York neighbours
RRP **£85 (approx)**

Visual Sound
H2O
Still one of our favourite chorus pedals, the H2O also incorporates a separate Echo effect for added depth and coolness
RRP **£159**

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FRESHMAN

FA250GA & FA250GAC

All solid timber and tasty appointments are the hallmarks of Freshman's Cedar Creek series guitars, as on this OM and its sister cutaway electro model. Review by **Rick Batey**

Freshman guitars – based in Scotland and designed by Sean Kelly – are made in China, and over the past decade the brand has begun to make impressive inroads into the UK market. The instruments we're looking at this month come from the midrange Cedar Creek collection, none of which actually contains cedar. Still, it's an eminently sensible series, being based around two all-time great designs: the OM/000 and the dreadnought. To this basic choice you can add the option of solid mahogany backs and sides (the 250 models) or solid Indian rosewood (the 400s) and then specify whether you want a straight acoustic, or a cutaway plus onboard electronics.

The two we're looking at are both mahogany orchestra models, but one has a cutaway/pickup, which means a £100 upcharge. This gives us a chance to examine the level of consistency between two fairly similar guitars.

First impressions? Great. With natural, woody trim and satin finishes all over, plus scratchplates thoughtfully parked in the case pockets, these look like neat, workmanlike guitars. The tops are solid sitka; some Cedar Creek models offer Engelmann spruce but we rate sitka as the all-round choice for fingerpicking and flatpicking alike. The spruce is Canadian and both examples are cut on the quarter, with straight grain. The cutaway model has the bonus of a greater showing of medullary rays

Mahogany neck with stacked heel and a second strap button ready-fitted

Solid sitka top and a tasteful herringbone soundhole rosette

With natural, woody trim, herringbone binding and satin finishes, these look like neat and workmanlike guitars

but the downside of a touch of run-out, displaying itself as a slight variation in colour between the halves. The purfling is herringbone, echoed by the soundhole ring, backstrip and endblock inlay, and it looks very fine.

The solid mahogany used for the backs and sides is impressive quality, without any of that streaky '70s-interior-door effect. It's been stained a medium brown, and we like the almost-matching mahogany back and front binding, with the artful cosmetic lift of the thinnest of thin maple lines around the sides. The effect is subtle and classy.

One thing we do mind, though, is that the shape of the cutaway model isn't quite right. It may not show in the photographs, but whereas the non-cutaway FA250GA captures that gorgeous curve of the Martin outline as the hips sweep upwards to the turn of the waist, the electro version's rims have a faint flatspot. Are we being picky? Yes, but with a design as time-honoured as this one it's a shame when the execution isn't spot-on.

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FACTFILE
FA250GA

DESCRIPTION **OM-sized acoustic. Made in China**
PRICE **£399 inc. pod case**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top, solid mahogany back and sides, 20-fret set mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, gold diecast tuners**
ELECTRICS **None**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Satin all over**

SCALE LENGTH
656mm/24.8"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43.5mm
12th fret 55mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.5mm
10th fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.0mm
12th fret bass 2.3mm
WEIGHT **1.77kg/3.9lbs**

CONTACT **Freshman Guitars**
www.freshmanguitars.net

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Sigma 000M-18
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Like the Freshman, a full-scale sitka-topped OM but with laminated mahogany back and sides
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Recording King
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Mariner
Eunoia-OM
This *G&B* award-winner is an OM in solid spruce and paulownia: a fine, and eco-conscious, choice
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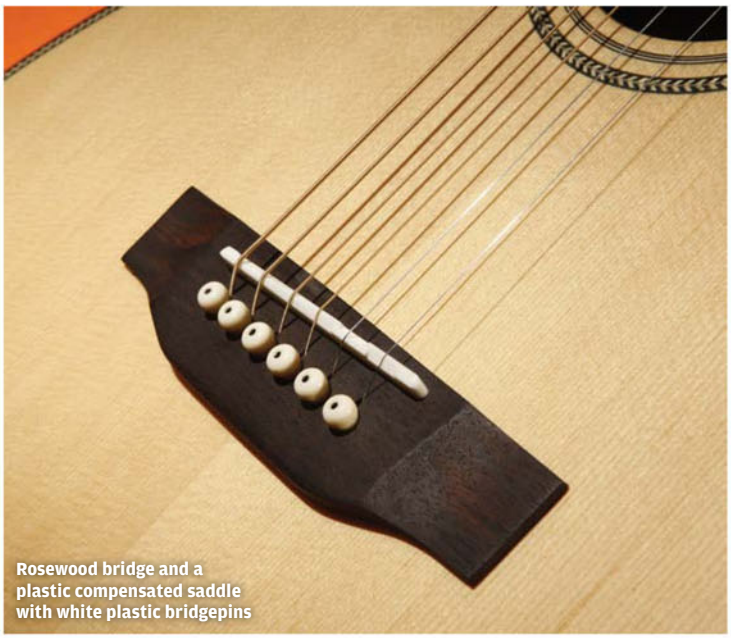

Rosewood bridge and a plastic compensated saddle with white plastic bridgepins

The FA250GA is a strong contender, loud and open, with plenty of treble and a firm and expressive bottom end

The bridges are rosewood in the traditional Martin-esque pattern save for sloping shoulders, with compensated plastic saddles (with corners that protrude somewhat into the hand) and plastic bridgepins. We would have liked to have seen bone saddles and at this price that's perhaps not too unreasonable a wish, but it would be an easy upgrade in the future; fitting a bone nut, though, would likely cost you £40-£60. String spacing at the saddle is 55mm, a decent compromise for finger and pick work alike.

Inside both guitars are clean, with mahogany kerfed linings and non-scalloped spruce X-bracing with no signs of glue squeeze-out. Truss rod access is inside, via a hex nut that protrudes through the C brace just north of the soundhole.

The FA250s are built with a long 25.8" scale while the width of the necks at the nut measures 43.5mm, making for a welcome if tiny increase over the majority of Far Eastern acoustics. Trim-wise the necks have been matched with the bodies, with rosewood fingerboards bound with mahogany, further delineated on the front by slender fillets of maple. Plain pearl dots act as position markers, while tiny pearl dots act as a reference on the sides.

The necks are mahogany, with stacked heels and a scarf-jointed headstock. The headstock is a tasty design: curvy and elegantly flared, it's a little like a '60s Epiphone headstock, and is faced in rosewood with the same mahogany/maple binding combo as the neck and body, with the 'Freshman' logo picked out as a gold decal.

The machineheads are, well, a bit of a bold statement: gold-plated with large 'onyx' buttons, essentially streaky transparent pink plastic with a distinctly boiled-sweet look. You wouldn't call them traditional, but they make an impact. They are smooth and low-geared in operation; allied with excellent intonation, this makes both guitars a pleasure to tune. Finally, both models come with strap buttons ready-installed both at the heel and at the base of the neck.

FA250GA

Let's take a look at each guitar in turn and assess each one for playability and sound. The non-cutaway, non-electro FA250GA slips onto the lap as easily as any OM; it's lightweight and the neck angle is spot-on, with the fingerboard lining up at a point just above the top of the bridge, which bodes well.

In terms of playability it's not quite as good as we'd hoped. The neck profile is a slim C-cum-D at the nut, thickening noticeably to a fairly hefty vintage-style 25mm by the time you reach the 10th fret, which we like. Though the relief is fine, the saddle could come down a touch and the narrow 35mm string spacing – a whole millimetre less than a Yamaha APX – is an actual 0.5mm over the stated neck width in the specs. This puts the strings a fraction too far away from the edges of the board, so thumb-over techniques could be a good deal easier. The factory-fitted strings, by the way, are D'Addario EXPs, one of our more favoured coated types.

In terms of sound the FA250GA is a really strong contender. It's loud and open, with plenty of treble content underpinned by a firm and expressive bottom end, making for effective and big-sounding flatpicking and responsive fingerpicking, while blues or ragtimey alternating thumb work sound lively and bouncy, with excellent balance between treble and bass. Overall, very good indeed.

FINAL SCORE	
FRESHMAN FA250GA	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

FA250GAC

As well as having a cutaway giving access to the top of the fingerboard, the FA250GAC comes with a factory-fitted undersaddle piezo strip and a Fishman Presys preamp mounted in the upper rim. A little catch allows the whole preamp unit to swing outwards, a clever design which gives easy access to the battery (although the daylight visible between preamp and surround is initially slightly alarming). Controls are volume, and output-muting tuner (which also works unplugged), phase reverse, and a three-band EQ, while the gold bottom strap button has been transformed into an endpin jack.

Our review example is slightly better set-up than the non-cutaway; the string spacing at the nut is the same and

Stylish mahogany-bound headstock with extrovert tuner buttons

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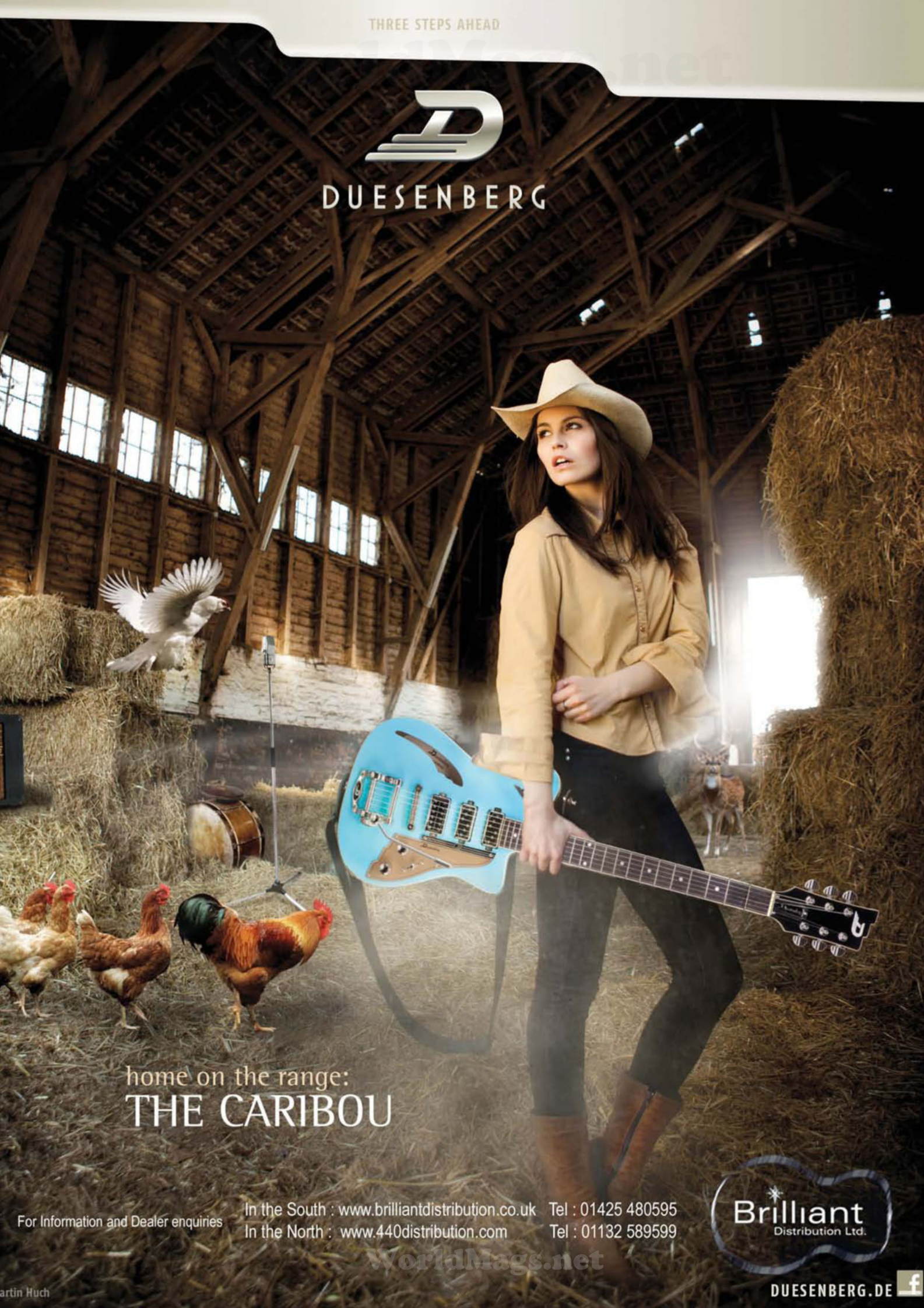

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FACTFILE
FA250GAC

DESCRIPTION **OM-sized cutaway electro-acoustic. Made in China**
PRICE **£499 inc. pod case**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top, solid mahogany back and sides, 20-fret set mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, gold diecast tuners**
ELECTRICS **Fishman Presys**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Satin all over**

SCALE LENGTH
656mm/24.8"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43.5mm
12th fret 55mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.5mm
10th fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.1mm
12th fret bass 2.9mm
WEIGHT **1.88kg/4.15lbs**

CONTACT **Freshman Guitars**
www.freshmanguitars.net

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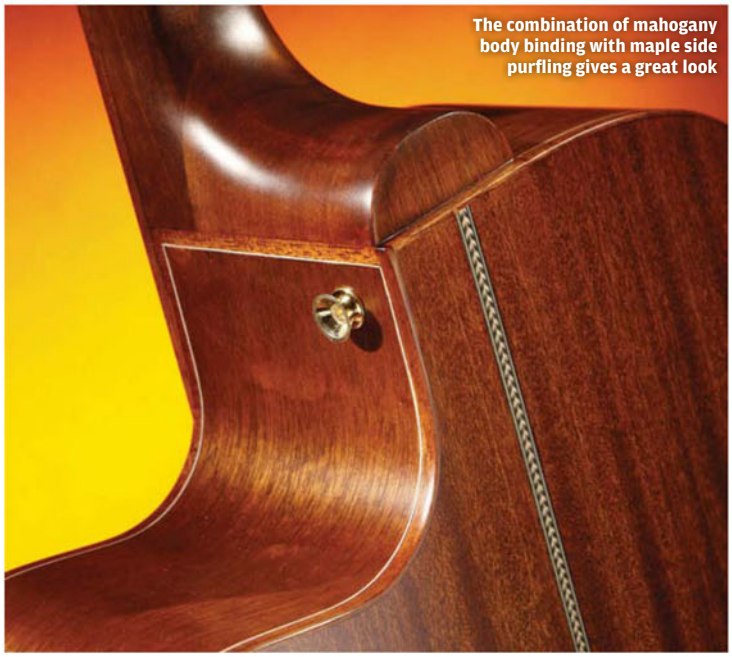
Martin
000X1
The most affordable electro 000 from the biggest name in the biz, with a solid spruce top and a Fishman Sonitone preamp
RRP **£539**



The combination of mahogany body binding with maple side purfling gives a great look

The FA250GAC is a touch warmer and more subdued and for strumming and chords it's sweeter and more together

the action at the 12th fret is actually higher, but the nut is cut lower, and that makes a difference. In terms of sound the two are naturally very alike but the FA250GAC is just a touch warmer yet more subdued, without the same bright definition from the bottom string and a touch less 'wow' factor. It's still a perfectly-nice sounding guitar and for strumming and chord work it may be fractionally sweeter and more together, according to your tastes.

With the Fishman system we're on very familiar ground. The truth is that every person at this magazine would probably plump for the fully acoustic model and then fit their own choice of aftermarket pickup, but not everyone has the time or inclination to weigh the pros and cons of soundhole magnetics, internal mics and bugs glued to the bridgeplate, nor do they want to be troubled by discussion of outboard preamps. So, as ever, the Fishman is a fair-sounding example of the undersaddle system commonly fitted to import electro-acoustics these days, with fairly well-chosen EQ bands. Dipping the mids and easing off the treble a fraction makes it sound a touch more natural, but there's that ever-present clicky, plastic attack – especially at the bass end – and a harshness and a two-dimensional quality that seems to go hand-in-hand with many undersaddle systems. Still, it works, it's a convenient one-stop solution, and a tuner is always useful to have on hand.

Fishman preamp has a swing-out design for battery replacement

Verdict

There's a lot to like about these two Cedar Creek series guitars from Freshman. The prices on both includes 'pod' cases – lightweight semi-hard types with shoulder straps which are just the thing for a bus ride to the local singers' night. Both guitars are cleanly made, with subtle and attractive cosmetics, from the all-wood binding through to the herringbone trim and those shapely headstocks (though the tuner buttons may divide opinion). Construction-wise, only the faint anomaly with the GAC model's outline draws our attention: more importantly, the quality of finish and the set of the necks is above reproach. Some might think an aftermarket set-up with bone nut and saddle would enable both guitars to reach their full playing potential, but the quality of the sound – especially on the non-cutaway model, which is a right little humdinger – is pretty darn good already.

FINAL SCORE	
FRESHMAN FA250GAC	
Build Quality	**17** /20
Playability	**17** /20
Sound	**15** /20
Value for money	**16** /20
Looks	**18** /20
TOTAL	**83%**

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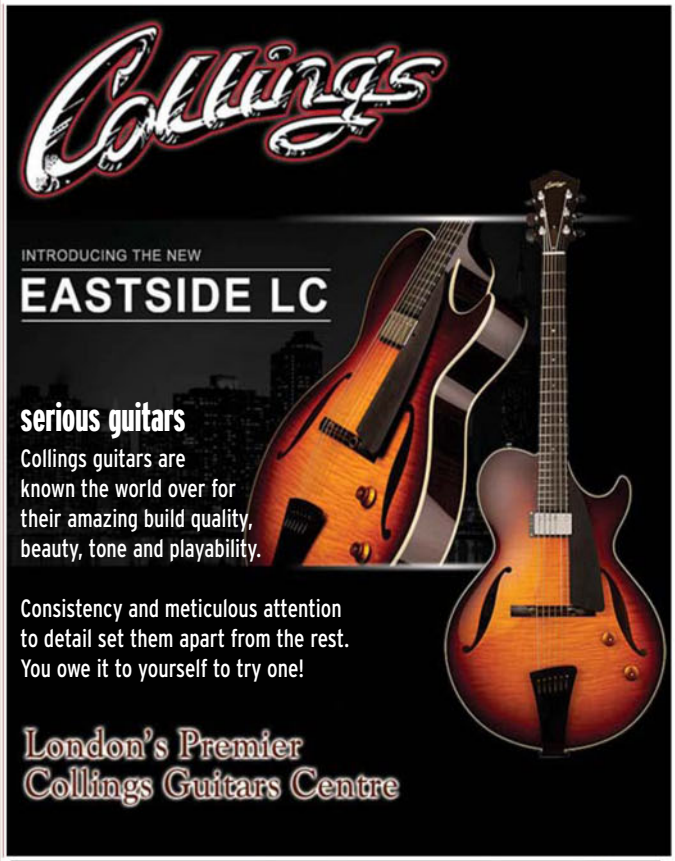

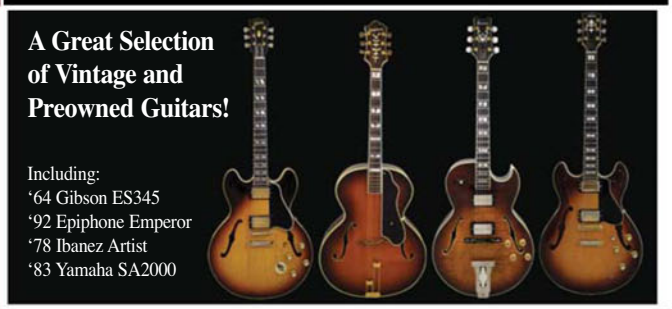

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FAITH
FRMG Mars

Designed in the UK by Patrick James Eggle, Faith guitars are built to high specs out in Indonesia. **Huw Price** tests the all-mahogany FRMG Mars

Single species all-solid acoustics have been around since the Martin company revived its Style 17 models in 1922, and probably before. Martin's 2-17 is important, because it had heavier bracing to go with the mahogany top – and it was the first Martin production model designed specifically for steel strings. If it hadn't been so successful, the evolution of the guitar may have taken quite a different course.

There was another reason for the switch to mahogany tops: during the 1920s the American economy was in a severe depression and at the time, mahogany was cheaper than spruce. So here we are in the midst of a global economic crisis once again, but that's unlikely to fully explain the increase in interest for mahogany-topped acoustics in recent years – it's more likely driven by the success of reissues such as those by Guild, and the Martin 15 series.

The Faith's slope-shouldered dreadnought body has a Gibson J-45 sort of look, and the factory saved the best bit of mahogany for the soundboard. It's all solid stuff, but the bookmatched front has some attractive figuring with some colour variation.

The Mars FRMG's body binding is streaky Macassar ebony

The fingerboard and the peghead overlay are ebony too

The Faith's slope-shouldered body has a J-45 look, and the factory saved the best bit of mahogany for the soundboard

In contrast, the back and sides have a fairly straight and plain grain pattern.

There's nothing plain about the fingerboard and bridge, because they're figured Macassar ebony. Most of us would associate ebony with an even, black-coloured appearance that can be achieved by fair means or foul, but this stuff has well-defined stripy grain lines with black and tan streaks. It looks nice enough in the raw but under a glossy finish it looks even better, as you can see from the body binding and the peghead overlay. ➔

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FACTFILE
FAITH FRMG MARS

DESCRIPTION **Slope shoulder dreadnought. Made in Indonesia**
PRICE **£689 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Solid mahogany top with solid mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck, 20-fret Macassar ebony fingerboard and bridge, Grover Rotomatic tuners**
ELECTRICS **Shadow Performer Tuner Preamp with Shadow Nanoflex II Pickup (optional)**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **PU lacquer; gloss body, satin neck**

SCALE LENGTH
25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 19mm
Ninth fret 22mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 36mm
Bridge 54.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2.5mm
WEIGHT **2.2kg/4.84lbs**

CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins**
01691 652449
www.faithguitars.com

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Martin
000-15M
All-solid mahogany body and neck with morado bridge and fretboard, open-geared nickel machine heads with butterbean knobs, satin finish. Hardshell case included
RRP **£1073**

Recording King
ROS-616
An old-school 12-fret model with an OOO body, solid mahogany top, back and sides, mahogany V-profile neck, slotted headstock, rosewood fretboard, bone nut, herringbone binding, nitro finish and hard case
RRP **£327**

Taylor
522
A grand concert-shaped body combined with a 12th fret neck join, plus solid mahogany top, back and sides. Hard case included
RRP **£1634**

Even the bridge pins and tuner buttons are ebony. The pins have abalone dots, which match the understated rosette, but the 12th fret and peghead inlays are executed in white pearl. More wood is used for the trussrod cover and the standard of the finish, binding and inlay work impresses, to say the least. Some, however, may be less charmed by the five-layer stacked heel and the Tusq nut and saddle.

Faith's UK-based designer Patrick James Eggle devised the bracing pattern, and the factory also uses a variation on Eggle's hybrid neck joint. The joint itself is actually a traditional dovetail with the mating surfaces accurately cut to ensure maximum wood to wood contact. Apparently it's an extremely tight joint, even without glue, but nevertheless bolts are used to hold everything in place. The body and neck are sprayed separately – gloss for the body and satin for the neck – before they're joined, and the fingerboard extension is then glued to the top. The joint feels solid, but close inspection does show up some small gaps between the heel and body that failed the Rizla paper test. However, there was nothing to indicate that the joint was anything other than rock-solid.

The soundhole inlay is a single band of coloured abalone

Sound

The low string action and shallow C-shaped neck provide a smooth and effortless playing feel – in fact, the Mars requires barely any more effort than most electric guitars. The response is free and dynamic, so you don't need to play hard to get the wood moving.

Some all-mahogany guitars can sound a bit subdued and lacking in brightness compared to similarly spec'd guitars with spruce tops, but the trade-off is usually a woodier and more intimate playing experience with sweeter, more rolled-off trebles. The Mars falls somewhere in between these two camps. This is actually a fairly bright-sounding guitar, and certainly not shy in volume. The high frequencies are chiming and clearly defined, but they stop short of the metallic or pingy tone that occasionally characterises factory-fresh spruce-topped guitars.

At the other end of the frequency spectrum the bottom end lacks a bit of the thump and weight you might associate with dreadnoughts, but even so there's a nice degree of snap and the bass notes are well-defined. The midrange is slightly scooped but the upper harmonics don't drown out the fundamental frequencies of the mid or low strings, so root notes cut through whether you're flatpicking or picking with bare fingers.

Unlike many mahogany guitars, and despite the body shape, the Mars doesn't have a nostalgic, old-school tone. The sonic character is certainly 'woodier' than you might expect from a conventional acoustic but, having said that, the character of the open wound strings is changed by putting a capo anywhere on the neck: the same strings are noticeably brighter when they're coming straight off the nut. This is true to a greater or lesser extent for most guitars with conventional nuts rather than zero frets, but it's worth mentioning it here because the effect is more pronounced than usual. On balance we like it because it gives the Mars a more even response across the strings, and with fewer upper harmonics flying around the Mars' tone becomes drier and even clearer. It works wonders for fingerpicking, especially in open tunings, where the Mars gets close to a Nick Drake sort of tone.

We can't criticise the build quality or playability of this guitar – and we'd say the same if the price was doubled

The flared headstock carries ebony-buttoned Grover Rotomatic machineheads

Verdict

Besides some barely noticeable gaps between the body and heel, we can't really criticise the build quality or playability of this guitar – and in fact we'd say the same if the price was doubled. The FRMG Mars successfully combines the intimate, woody tones of a typical all-mahogany guitar with a bit of extra brightness and chime.

FINAL SCORE

FAITH FRMG MARS	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**19**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

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FENDER

American Vintage '74 Jazz Bass & Classic Series '50s Precision Bass

Not one but two reissue Fender basses this month: a Jazz from the much-maligned 1970s and a more affordable '50s Precision that looks like a goodie. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

In recent years there has been something of a proliferation in the number of Fender basses available to the eager punter. Although this has created a rich pool of options in prices, specs, vintage reissues and reproductions available to the discerning groovester, it can be a bit confusing and may mean making the right choice has become tougher than it should be. We love the variety; attempting to provide something for almost everyone is no bad thing, and at least Fender haven't tinkered with the sacred Precision and Jazz templates – and when they have, they've given the resultant mongrel a name that makes it easy for us to differentiate. Some of the more recent additions to the roster are the Classic Series '50s Precision – made in Mexico – and the USA-built American Vintage '74 Jazz Bass.

The electronics two volumes, one tone – are unchanged since 1961

The neck is bound and finished in an untinted gloss poly

'74 Jazz Bass

In 1974 Fender tweaked a number of details of the layout of the Jazz's body and also the contour and design of the neck. Thankfully they didn't make it look different, so our review model still has the sleek, offset alder body and the full set of comfort chamfers, ribcage and forearm, while the headstock is the same as well. The body is finished in a classy three-tone sunburst with a three-ply black/white/black pickguard and features the first authentic 1974 detail, a thumb rest above the E string.

In 1974 Fender added a thumb rest, moved the bridge pickup and changed the neck to a chunkier U-shaped profile

The other alterations Fender made in 1974 had more effect, and they've been reproduced faithfully here. The most noticeable one is the chunkier U profile maple neck, which replaced the previously employed slimmer C contour. The difference in feel under the hand is actually quite marked; some will feel it's easier and some will find it harder to play. Our review model has a good old rosewood fingerboard (maple is an option) which, in repro-correct manner, is of the bent veneer type and bound in white plastic, although the neck doesn't have the walnut skunk-stripe of ➔

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FACTFILE

FENDER AMERICAN VINTAGE '74 JAZZ BASS

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in USA**
PRICE **£2410.80 inc. case**

BUILD **Alder body, maple neck with 20 medium vintage-style frets on a bound round-laminated rosewood fingerboard (maple is a standard option). Fender American Vintage Bass bridge with single-groove steel barrels and '70s-style stamped open gear tuners. Chrome hardware**
ELECTRICS **Passive with two Fender American Vintage '74 Jazz Bass single-coil pickups, two volumes and one tone control**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Three-tone sunburst, as reviewed; Lake Placid blue, olympic white and black, all £2350.80**

SCALE LENGTH
34"/864mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 37mm
12th fret 56mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 23mm
12th fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 11mm
Bridge 19.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT **4.14kg/9.08lbs**

CONTACT **Fender GB&I**
01342 331700
www.fender.com

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Black guard is authentic for '74. As for the thumb rest, just whip it off if it gets in the way

The repositioned bridge pickup gives more width and a raspy edge to the tone, but is it a classic Jazz Bass sound?

its forebear. The classy look is further enhanced by block fretboard inlays (with black dots along top edge) and 20 'vintage-style' (medium) nickel frets.

As well as chrome Fender open-gear tuners, the hardware includes chrome pickup and bridge covers, the latter completely obscuring the bridge, also in chrome, with its single-groove steel 'barrel' saddles. Most players, we guess, will find it necessary to remove both covers; the '74 reissue just doesn't feel comfortable to play with them in place, and they can seriously restrict what you do on the bass (unless, that is, you wield a pick, as the covers are perfect locations for your palm). Still, it's strange that a Jazz Bass designed for the 1974 market would still have this somewhat archaic provision when the crushing majority of name bassists at this time were fingerstylists.

One of the more interesting tweaks of 1974 involved positioning the bridge pickup – in this instance one of a pair of American Vintage '74 Jazz Bass Single-Coil units – closer to the bridge than it had been before. It's actually about 8mm closer compared to a modern Squier Jazz, and it'll be interesting to see what effect this has on the hallowed tone. Fender didn't attempt anything fancy with the electronic guts, so the controls are the same as they've always been on the Jazz Bass – two pickup Volumes and one master Tone control.

Sounds

Tonally, the re-positioning of the bridge pickup has a small effect on the sound. With the bridge pickup soloed you get the feeling of more width and more of a raspy edge to the gurgly tone without an increase in nasal honk. There's less treble response – attacking the G string gets a synthetic-sounding result. It's not as a choked as a Precision, but is it a classic Jazz Bass sound? You'd expect more difference given the greater proximity to the bridge, but the impact on the sound is moderate. So, the AVJ is a little fatter and less spiky; the neck pickup has acquired a position of minor prominence, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but there's still a pleasing growl and the tone is still tight enough to justify calling the '74 Jazz 'funky'.

FINAL SCORE

AMERICAN VINTAGE '74 JAZZ BASS	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**14**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**13**/20
Vibe	**15**/20
TOTAL	**79%**

Classic Series '50s Precision

The '50s Precision is a handsome-looking instrument, although in this instance Fender seems less interested in trumpeting many and varied vintage appointments, describing it simply as delivering the 'look, sound and vibe of Fender's first basses' (undoubtedly using modern materials and updated construction methods). Alder lurks beneath the black urethane top coat, and the body still has the outline and contours we love. The feature that really draws the eye is the gold anodised pickguard, a spot-on period detail from 1957 to 1959, although this usage didn't last long as the original aluminium versions rapidly became blotchy and discoloured by sweat. It looks cool, though, and we're assured this modern repro is made of much sterner and more sweat-resistant stuff.

All finish options come in a maple neck and fingerboard configuration – this time with a skunk stripe around the back – but it would seem that '50s design was more directly focused on ease of playing as the contour is of the slim C variety, making it smooth, fast and ultra-comfortable to play. The recessed headstock is fitted with a set of American Vintage Reverse Open Gear tuners along the top edge, in chrome to match the rest of the hardware, plus a string tree for D and G strings and a synthetic bone nut, all of which should all contribute positively to making this bass sound the business.

There are 20 medium nickel frets on the fingerboard, which Fender also describes as 'vintage-style', and a set of black dot markers which, interestingly enough, were inserted onto Precision necks from '51-'59. More dots line the top edge and you also get a traditional-

Reverse-action tuners are quite easy to get used to

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As usual the reissue gold scratchplate has holes for a pickup cover, but the body isn't drilled

The feature that really draws the eye is the gold anodised scratchplate, a spot-on period detail from 1957-1959

looking four-saddle American Vintage Bass bridge; adjustments require the old-school combination of Phillips and thin flathead screwdrivers.

Early Precisions had a one-piece single-coil pickup but that was replaced in 1957, a year of many changes, by the split-coil unit in place here. This one is a Vintage Split Single-Coil Precision Bass model wired, as ever, in humbucking mode and centrally located, and as always it's hooked up to one Volume and one Tone control.

Sounds

The pickup on the '50s P Bass is where it's supposed to be, so what you get is quite simply a really good-sounding Precision. Wind the tone control right up and the reward is a fat bottom end with pleasing growl that combines plenty of aggressive intent with excellent clarity. This earthy feel is supported by a midrange that's clean and even, while erring on the darker, low-mid side for just enough stature and impact – a nice big tone with plenty of punch. Though the well-realised highs have always contributed to the Precision's clear-speaking character, they're nowhere near explosive and even feel a little compressed if you really lay into the D and G strings – but they're certainly not brittle, having plenty of substance and practicality. As always, backing off the tone induces a more polite sound with blurred edges, creating a sound that feels progressively more controlled. Some would call this removing all the fun from the P-Bass sound, but we couldn't possibly comment.

Tinted maple neck bolted to a not-too-heavy alder body

Verdict

It's not quite the tale of two basses, but the '50s Precision is the undeniable shining light of the two. The retrofication hasn't impinged on excellent playability; it really does sound like a good Precision, and the cosmetic variations – the black dots, the anodised pickguard, the rationalised headstock – all contribute to create a character close to that of its forebear. It's sensibly priced and if you don't expect it to impersonate an actual '50s P Bass, you won't be disappointed. With the Jazz, there's a head-on collision between the good aspects (the looks, the slightly beefier sound) and the not-so-good (the inflated price, plus the pointlessly chunky neck profile) and the 'so what?' (the relocated bridge pickup). It's not that the '74 Jazz is a bad bass, but it feels harder to play than any other Jazz in the catalogue and doesn't sound any better. A shame, because from the front it looks like a belter.

FINAL SCORE	
CLASSIC SERIES '50S PRECISION	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	85%

FACTFILE

CLASSIC SERIES '50S PRECISION

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in Mexico**
PRICE **£862.80 inc. case**

BUILD **Alder body, maple neck with 20 medium vintage-style frets on a maple fingerboard. Fender American Vintage Bass bridge and reverse open tuners. Chrome hardware**
ELECTRICS **Passive with one Fender Vintage Split single-coil pickup wired in humbucking mode, one volume and one tone control**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Black and fiesta red, £862.80; honey blonde and two-tone sunburst, £898.80**

SCALE LENGTH
34"/864mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 44mm
12th fret 58mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
12th fret 24mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 13.5mm
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 2.5mm
WEIGHT **4.13kg/9.11lbs**

CONTACT **Fender GB&I**
01342 331700
www.fender.com

Like this? Try this...

Fender
American Standard Series Jazz Bass
At just over half the price of the '74, this comes as left-hand, fretless and five-string and sounds like a Jazz should
RRP **£1474-£1534**

Sandberg
California TT
A high-quality, hand-built active take on the Jazz
RRP **£1100**

Fender
Classic Series '70s Precision Bass
Bound neck with blocks, a thumb rest and all the goodies of the period
RRP **£1162**

Squier
Vintage Modified Precision Bass
Or go down the budget route with this sturdy Precision with Duncan Designed pickup
RRP **£327**

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WARWICK
RockBass Star Bass

With passive single-coils and a hefty dose of charismatic ’60s looks, the relatively affordable new Chinese-made Star Bass is a stage rocker deluxe. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Is the year 2013 heralding the return of hollowbody bass? It seems to be. True, this breed of instrument has been around for over 50 years, but right now there seems to be a fair number of players who are choosing hollowbodies not as a third or fourth preference but as a main weapon of choice. We love them: we’re drawn to the earthy tones and classic styling, and we like the fact that we can clearly hear what we’re playing when we’re not plugged in without walloping the hell out of the strings.

Warwick, the German company most famous for the contemporary active basses wielded by a dizzying array of luminaries, added the hollowbody Star Bass to the roster a few years ago – and here’s the more affordable option, the Chinese-made RockBass version.

The Star Bass is actually a semi-hollowbody in similar fashion to Epiphone’s Jack Casady or the Hagstrom Viking. The body is 47mm deep; that’s pretty slim, only about 6mm fatter than a Fender Precision, and a few minor tweaks to your playing position should take care of any comfort issues.

The general layout, of course, takes its origins from the double cutaway Gibson EB-2 with its twin f-holes. On the Warwick design, however, the lower horn projects fractionally further towards the headstock than the upper one, giving the slightest hint of a reverse-body style.

Angled tuners and a body-matching daphne blue finish

Rosewood board and a maple neck with Ekanga inserts

The Star Bass has a laminated maple body with a central internal block giving solid support for bridge and pickups

Beneath the appealing and neatly applied daphne blue finish the body of the Star Bass is made of laminated maple, bound at the edges with a sixfold ply of cream and black. Peer inside an f-hole and you’ll see the central internal block which provides a solid support for the bridge and the pickups. Either side of the block the upper and lower chambers provide enough natural resonance to give some acoustic volume and help shape the sound.

The central block also creates a solid fixing point for the maple neck, which is secured into one end of the block using the set-in method with a glued mortis-and-tenon or a dovetail joint. Playability is good; the neck’s shallow C contour gives the Star Bass a similar feel to its electric cousin – cosy under the hand and conducive to flamboyant playing. The scale length is a medium 32", and this faint but discernible compression of the playing surface helps playing ➔

FACTFILE
WARWICK ROCKBASS STAR BASS

DESCRIPTION **Semi-hollowbody four-string bass. Made in China**
PRICE **£789**

BUILD **Bound laminated maple body with f-holes, maple set neck with 21 extra-high jumbo nickel-silver frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Warwick two-piece bridge, Warwick closed-gear tuners, chrome hardware**
ELECTRICS **Passive with two MEC Star Bass II single-coil pickups, two Volume and two Tone controls, three-way selector switch**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, at no extra cost; limited finishes**
FINISHES **Daphne blue high polish, black high polish, cream white high polish, vintage sunburst**
RANGE OPTIONS **Five-string, 34" scale, £889; fretless four- and five-string at no extra cost with same finish options; Star Bass Flamed Maple 4, £889; Flamed Maple 5-string £989 (both in vintage sunburst only)**

SCALE LENGTH
813mm/32"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 38mm
12th fret 56mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20mm
12th fret 24mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.0mm
12th fret bass 3.0mm
WEIGHT **3.72kg/8.2lbs**

CONTACT **Warwick UK**
0161 839 0666
warwickbass.com

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Ibanez
Artcore AGB200
A snip at the price, this passive twin-humbucker slimline single-cut semi-acoustic looks very impressive indeed
RRP **£389**

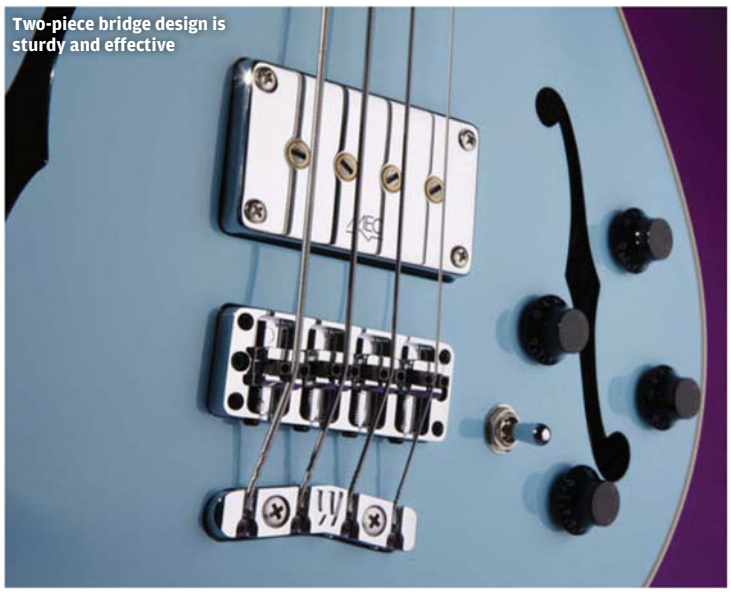
Epiphone
Jack Casady Signature
In posh gold or rocking black, this reissue of the '70s Gibson LP Signature bass comes with a single low-impedance humbucker
RRP **£899**

Vintage
VVB4 Violin Bass
If you really want a plunky hollowbody sound then this Cavern-flavoured bass offers an affordable alternative to the German-made original
RRP **£329**

speed even further. The neck is finished, like the body, in a pale daphne blue, but underneath it we're assured that the maple is divided by central stripes of what Warwick calls Ekanga, which isn't actually a timber, but a form of reconstituted wood veneer. Usually the company uses it for decoration on the necks of transparent-finish basses, but it must also have a strengthening effect as they've employed it here on a solid-finish neck.

The black-faced headstock is shaped to the familiar, noticeably more modern Warwick outline and carries a set of small-buttoned closed-gear tuners in chrome, plus a cover for the trussrod adjuster. The nut is Warwick's synthetic Just-A-Nut III, and the fingerboard is rosewood with no position markers on its face, only small white ones along the top edge. The 21 frets are what Warwick describes as 'extra high jumbo nickel-silver frets', although to be honest they look like mediums with a fairly regular profile to us. For the bridge Warwick has chosen a chunky chrome item with a separate string anchor.

It's passive all the way in the electronics department, with a pair of MEC Star Bass II single coil pickups in neck and bridge position. These big, flat, chunky chrome units are perfect for the look of the Star Bass. As is usual with passive electrics, there's nothing fancy when it comes to the controls: each pickup has a volume and a tone control, and the toggle switch is a standard three-way pickup selector.


Two-piece bridge design is sturdy and effective

Sounds

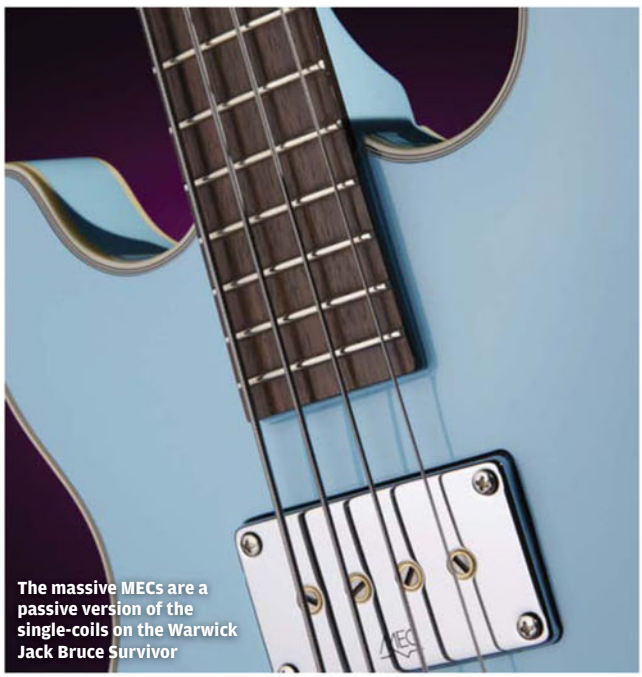
'Balance' is the watchword with the Star Bass both in form and function. Sitting down it's pretty stable on your lap, and when you plug in you'll be happy to discover a fairly even output level across all three pickup settings. With the switch set centrally for both pickups on you get a big, warm tone with the hint of a growl in the lower registers. The midrange is solid and even with a punchy edge, and the highs cut through just enough. Stylistically this sound comfortably works for a cross-section of rock, pop and contemporary soul – any genre, really, where old-school bottom takes precedence over toppiness.

Flicking the selector switch from centre to the 'up' position solos the neck pickup, producing an earthier sound with some woodier and more acoustic properties. The good news is that it isn't woolly at all: the E and A strings still speak clearly enough, while the D and G sound fatter and less spiky. This setting is a great starting point for traditionally-inclined bass work such as blues or old-school country.

Naturally the bridge pickup has the thinnest sound tonally, with a tight, nasty snarl on the E string and a pleasing level of snappy gurgle in the midrange. It isn't a super-wide kind of sound, but the tonal shift from the other two positions is well-controlled. It's certainly brighter and snappier but this doesn't equate to brittle and impractical, and there's plenty of body to the notes no matter how high you roam up the fingerboard.

In terms of useful variation, that's about all you get. Winding back the Tone control on the neck pickup reduces treble in amounts from subtle up to woolly full-cut. Perform the same trick on the bridge pickup and you get a stunted, almost compressed quality, while the twin-pickup voice morphs into a fat, bassy, space-filling rumble.

The Star Bass works for rock, pop and contemporary soul, or any genre where bottom takes precedence over toppiness


The massive MECs are a passive version of the single-coils on the Warwick Jack Bruce Survivor

Verdict

Warwick's RockBass Star Bass is a good addition to the burgeoning roster of hollowbody and semi-hollowbody instruments. The asking price of nigh-on £800 puts it right at the very top end of the 'affordable' bracket, but it's a well put-together bass with great stage presence. True, there are only three main sounds, but these add up to a starting point to let you cope with a fairly wide spectrum of music, and the decent balance married to a supremely playable neck makes for a highly pleasurable experience. Of course it's not going to have the right image for all situations, but that's showbiz; the Star Bass is still well worth a look.

FINAL SCORE

WARWICK ROCKBASS STAR BASS	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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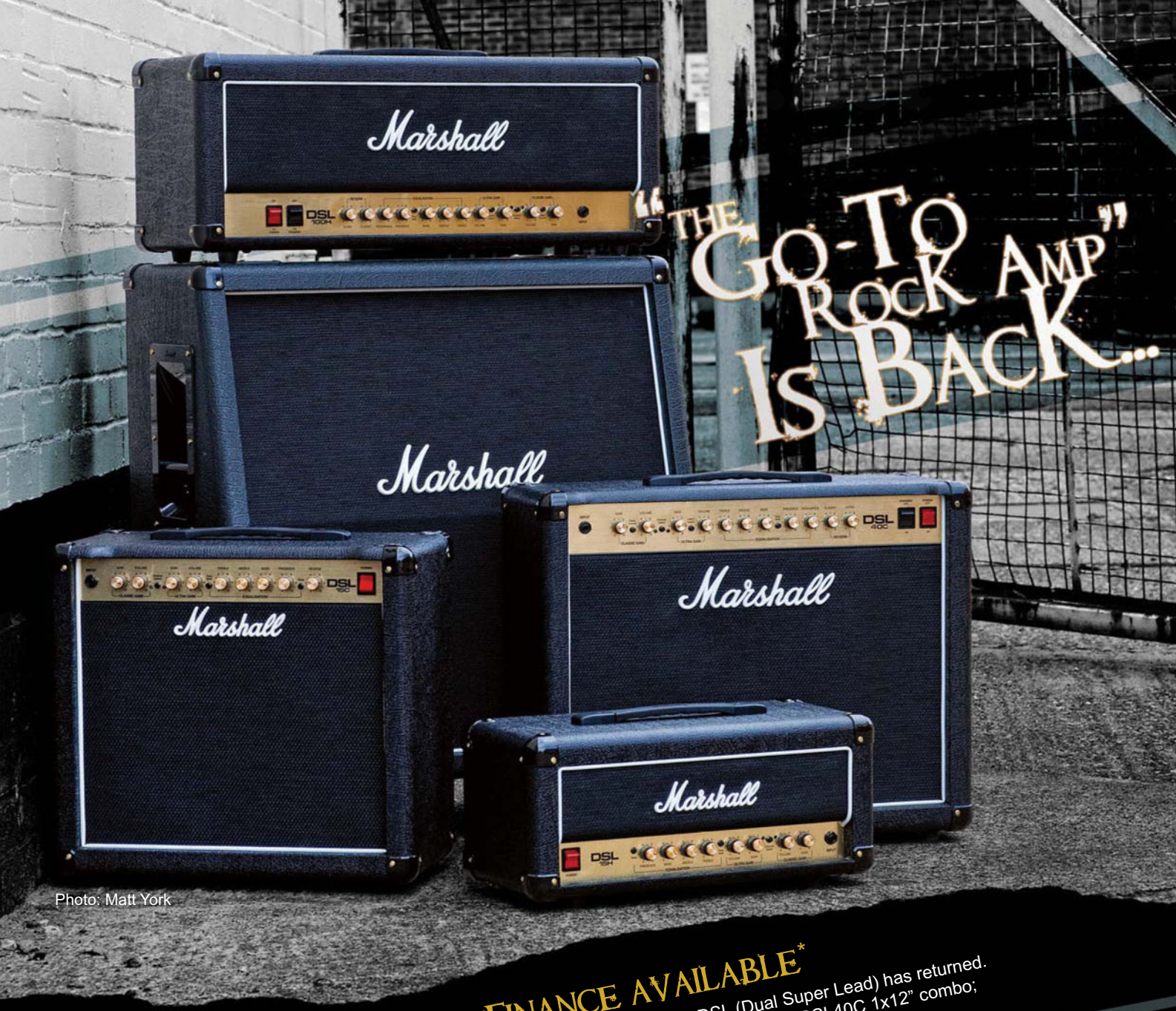

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PEAVEY

MAX 112 Bass Combo

This small gig/rehearsal combo has 'psycho-acoustic' low end enhancement to let you add grunt without caning the speaker. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Peavey describes the MAX series as 'powerful bass amplification', but this series of smaller bass combos is all about home practicing, lower volume rehearsing and small gigs. The range starts with the titchy MAX 126 giving 10W into a 6.5" and culminates with the beefy MAX 115 with 300W into a 15" driver and tweeter combination. From somewhere in the middle of this roster comes the MAX 112.

The MAX 112's cabinet is a compact oblong with a triangular wedge cut out at the back for tilting purposes, standing 504mm high, 416mm wide and 407mm deep and covered in mottled black vinyl. Peavey will only reveal that they use 'wood' to make it, suggesting they've employed a very affordable material; given the price, that's no great surprise. The 18.6kg/40.9lbs weight is reasonable, and the top-mounted strap is just about adequate for the job. There's one proprietary 12" speaker beneath the black steel grille, but the cabinet is not ported: Peavey relies on something called 'psycho-acoustic enhancement' in this department. It's basically an effect (or circuit) that fakes-up the bottom end to simulate louder and tighter lows without putting strain on the power amp or speaker.

The top-mounted control panel has five white chickenhead controls – Gain, Volume, and a three-band EQ with +/- 15dB for Bass (50Hz), Middle (at 600Hz with Mid Shift switch In, 250Hz when Out) and High (8kHz). The three switches are Punch (6dB boost @100Hz), Mid Shift, and Bright (10dB boost above 1kHz), while a TT (TransTube) Boost switch below the Gain control ups the gain, simulating valve distortion as it goes. The psycho-acoustics feature is also switchable and you also get an speaker-muting tuner. Alongside Passive and Active jack inputs, there's an XLR Direct Out with ground/lift switch and two mini jacks for Aux In (CD, MP3, etc) and headphones.

Sounds

A plethora of little switches gives the MAX 112 an unjustified air of complexity. It's actually very easy to use: just set the desired gain level and then, with the EQ flat, the little Peavey will reproduce the sound your bass sends it. You can use the valve-simulating TT Boost to create a shimmer of warm woolliness behind your basic note, or crank up Gain and cut the volume to bring on some full-on distorted mayhem.

The bass EQ is well-attenuated and thickens up the sound without overpowering the amp. Boosting Middle adds punch plus a barking, aggressive edge or a darker, slightly woollier tone depending on which Mid Shift setting you choose, and Treble provides plenty of clean cut and bite without excessive boosting. We found the two boost switches worked best without the respective frequency dials getting involved; Punch brings in tighter lows and low mids for definition that'll drive the groove, while Bright gives exactly the same result as a full boost to Treble – pleasingly gnarly, but with a clicky trade-off. The psycho-acoustic feature is interesting and works best with moderate bass boosts, providing a subtle degree of thickening without blurring the low-end definition.

Verdict

Peavey has always been really good at providing value for money and with the MAX 112 they've added yet another string to this bow. This combo will do very nicely for home practicing, rehearsals or smaller gigs. There's more than enough practical tonal shaping on offer via the well-thought out EQ and boost switches, while the psycho-acoustic feature works exactly as they promise. It's also fairly compact and portable, and a price of less than £300 for a 200W combo makes the MAX 112 well worth further investigation.

FINAL SCORE

PEAVEY MAX 112 BASS COMBO	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**15**/20
Sounds	**16**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**16**/20
TOTAL	**83%**

FACTFILE

PEAVEY MAX 112 BASS COMBO

DESCRIPTION **Single channel 200W transistor combo with generic 12" speaker in an unported 13mm 'wooden' cabinet. Made in China**
PRICE **£289**

CONTROLS **Volume, Bass, Middle and Treble controls, input, Tuner/Line out, headphone out and Mix In jack sockets**
EFFECT TYPES **Max 115 1x15"+ tweeter 300W combo, £309; Max 110 1x10" 100W combo, £239; Max 158 1x8" 20W combo, £109; Max 126 1x6.5" 10W combo, £53**

CONTACT **Peavey Electronics 01536 461 234 www.peavey.com**

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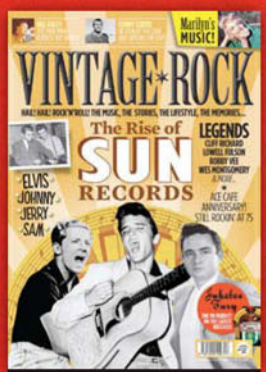

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Work & Play

Temptation can be a dangerous thing, and Phil Carwardine regularly puts himself right in the line of fire by owning a vintage guitar shop. Lars Mullen is sympathetic to his terrible plight – but only up to a certain point

A '68 Gibson SG Standard and a small-guard '65

The subject of this month's *Private Collection* is in the enviable position of owning a guitar business – Vintage & Modern in Thame, Oxfordshire – but, according to Phil Carwardine, being surrounded by potential objects of desire can actually become a double-edged sword. 'It can be a problem,' he laughs. 'You've got gorgeous rare and vintage guitars all over the place, and you're bombarded with new ones arriving on a regular basis.

'Guitar collectors or people who are just passionate about old and iconic guitars may think I'm a little crazy, but it's a nightmare... every day there's something new to tempt me to buy for my own collection. I just fall in love with them all, and I sometimes even get a little protective or jealous when someone wants to buy an instrument that I've been looking at ever since it came in!

'For example, I'm now sat in front of a new arrival – a 1965 Bigsby-loaded Gibson ES-335 in sunburst – and it's gorgeous. It's for the shop, but I have to have a private moment with it first! I really have a problem – I'm constantly being tormented as to how I can buy these guitars for myself. Honestly, sometimes it feels as if the TV, the hi-fi, the wife and even the dog are in danger of being pawned for cash! Today this 335 seems like the ultimate purchase, but what will tomorrow bring? It's just an ongoing situation. I'm a total guitar junkie... it's pure addiction.'

The premise behind Phil's shop, as you may have guessed from the name, is vintage guitars plus their modern equivalents – so if the customer can't aspire to owning, say, one of the many vintage Strats on display, they choose a modern, more affordable equivalent instead... and, of course, still have the chance to play an original.

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Phil's main love is for acoustic and semi-acoustic guitars but, as with many avid collectors, the temptation to stray far outweighs the consequences. 'When it comes to solidbodies you might notice that I don't have a Les Paul in the collection,' he begins. 'I just find them sonically a little too dark and muddy, and also too heavy on the shoulder. For me, the Gibson SG is where it's at: they're lighter and, to my ears, cut through with more of a midrangey quality.

'I have four SGs at the moment, and I see them all as really desirable guitars. The '68 on the left, the one with the full scratchplate, has the essence of AC/DC, and it's been played so much that it's fairly beaten up. Maybe because of that, it's a fabulous player... probably even slightly better than the '65 Standard next to it, which is really clean and really has the George Harrison thing going on.

'The same sort of contrast applies with the next pair, an SG Junior and SG Special, both dating from 1965. For me, the Special with the two P90s conjures up images of Carlos Santana at Woodstock, but it's the Junior that really stands out. As we know, the Junior was just a basic student guitar made from mahogany, which was the wood of the day back then and in plentiful supply. It's incredibly light, with a killer sound. All serious guitar players have their own vocabulary for a good guitar, and for me this guitar is "rambunctious"! Both these have had the Vibrola vibrato units removed at some time, probably due to tuning problems.'

Next to the SGs is another pair of mahogany guitars with a similar aim but a very different outcome. 'These solidbodied Guild electrics are also from around the early-to-mid '60s, a time when a lot of brands were looking to Gibson as an influence,' Phil explains. 'There's an obvious tip of the hat to the SG design here. This was the time, of course, when space exploration was all the news, and these have suitable names: the two-pickup model on the left is an S-100 Polara, complete with built-in guitar stand, while the single-pickup model is a S-50 Jet Star. The vibrato and bridge design on the Polara is a bit of a headache... if you break a string, you'll probably have to take the guitar to your local engineering works to have it dismantled! They're very cool, though. Those wide Honduras mahogany bodies contribute to the extra sustain and give a distinct sound, and they're considerably heavier than an SG.

'I adore Strats as well. I love listening to them and I love looking at them, but they're out of my comfort zone... I can't seem to rock out on one. I can get away with fingerpicking and bluesy material – for me, Hendrix had it with that tone on *The Wind Cries Mary*.

'This '62 sonic blue Strat is a classic example of a beaten-up guitar, worn in all the right places. It does have the optimal Fender sound, with a thick dark Brazilian rosewood fingerboard... very deep, rich and plummy. My thing for Strats at the moment is the fact that I don't want one with the serial number on the headstock, which is something they started doing in '75. This large-headstock '74 in olympic white has faded to more of a custard yellow colour. A lot of us can remember how for years Strats with big headstocks were frowned upon, but times have changed! This one is absolutely wonderful. It just does it all... killer sound, extremely resonant, and light as a feather.'

The collection takes a different direction as Phil shows us some of his favourite semi-acoustic guitars. 'This is what I like – big-bodied semis from the '40s onward,' he says. 'I'm a fingerpicker at heart, and I wear a metal thumbpick all day at the shop and even at home. It's a permanent fixture, I can't even tune a guitar without it!

'I have a band called Hiway 51, which is a cross between Johnny Cash and Elvis, a country/rockabilly set-up with the guitars providing a real vintage rootsy vibe. These next two Guild semis typify that era. This cherry red mahogany Starfire III with the sharp Florentine cutaway embodies Carl Perkins, Bo Diddley and the early rock'n'roll years. It has a nice tight sound with a barking midrange; the single coil Dynasonic pickups have a classic sound, almost akin to a Strat. At the time these guitars were more or less referred ↦

Both from 1965 – a Gibson SG Junior and an SG Special

Early-mid '60s Guild S-100 Polara and an S-50 Jet Star

The Guild Polara has an innovative built-in stand

Two Strats – a '74 on the left and a sonic blue from 1962

A '67 Guild Duane Eddy and a single-cut Guild Starfire III

to as poor man's Gibsons, but they've evolved into collectable guitars in their own right.

'The other Guild with the more rounded Venetian cutaway and gold hardware is a '67 DE-500, the Duane Eddie model. The sound of this guitar through my main gigging amp – which is the Gibson GA-30RVT Invader combo in the background, with one 10" and one 12" speaker – makes the hairs on my arms and neck stand on end, especially through the reverb channel. Mind you, it's a far cry from the 2000 gallon oil tank Duane supposedly used to get that big echoey sound.

'We all love the vintage waft when we open an old guitar case, but when I opened this one I was nearly ill with the smell of nicotine, and I'm an ex-smoker! For 44 years up until I bought a couple of years ago it had been the house guitar in a smoky Californian night club – a guitar that all guests and touring guitarists would use for their spot, so it never left the building and soaked up all the smoke. I literally left it outside for days on end to get rid of some of the smell before it came into the house, and most of it's gone now.

'The nicotine aged the bindings and, if anything, enhanced the grain of the maple. This is the condition I like certain guitars to be in, looking like as if they've been around the block and done the work. If anything, I feel a little cheated if a vintage guitar is in perfect condition, lacking years of mojo. I've been offered lots of clean vintage guitars for the shop, and I often find myself thinking "I really should be buying this", but you know what? I just don't want to. Of course, if a customer comes in and asks for an immaculate '60s Strat or similar, then I'm obliged to find the right guitar for them.

Mike Matthews Freedom amp from the 1970s

'This amp looks like a beaten-up sandwich box and I'm sure Beezebub's demons live inside'

'I'm not quite so potty with the amps, but I do have some nice old Gretsches and Gibsons which I use live. They still sound great, but I don't buy into "old is best" when it comes to amps. Some new handbuilt amps are superb, like my Dennis Cornell Romany Plus. I do have a few old amps which I like for their tone, such as this Freedom combo, built by Mike Matthews, the main guy at Electro Harmonix. It looks like a beaten-up sandwich box and there's nothing inside but an old circuit board full of transistors – but I kid you not, I can't crank it up in a small room. I'm sure Beelzebub's demons live inside...'

Though Phil likes his old Guilds, he positively adores his old Gretsches. 'They're my first choice when it comes to playing with the band,' he says. 'This tobacco sunburst is a '58 Anniversary model. I believe the Anniversary was going to be a limited run, but it's still going today – it's the longest-serving model in the catalogue! It's quite heavy, as it has what they describe as "trestle bracing". This got lighter as they moved on to the famous 6120 model in late '59, which is very close to this one, but double the money. How ➔

'58 Gretsch Anniversary and a fine '61 6120

'55 Country Club and '55 Streamliner with Melita bridge (inset)

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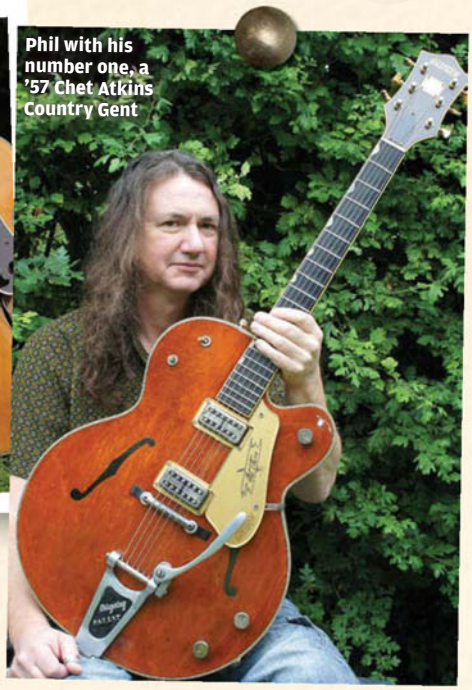
Gretsch '65 Country Club and a Gretsch Constellation with added pickup


Phil with his number one, a '57 Chet Atkins Country Gent

Close-up of the Country Gent's "Smooth'Tron" bridge pickup

weird is it that '59 seems to be the golden year for so many brands? This Anniversary is slightly lacking in spec – it's got no f-holes and the ebony fingerboard isn't bound, but it's still a great guitar to own. I added the Bigsby vibrato some time ago – I think all big-bodied Gretsches should have one.

'I also have a 6120 from '61, the last year before they went to the double cutaway. For some collectors it's less desirable as the body is ¼" thinner, but I feel that makes it quite a unique model. It's just a little fatter than a Gibson ES-335. Neil Young plays a 6120!

'I think one of the best Gretsches for rockabilly is the Country Club. Mine is a '55 with the bullet truss rod cover and copper-finish back and sides with a bamboo mist top. The DynaSonic pickups have what I call the gritty "Club growl". I remember when I was a kid I would just sit and look at the Melita Synchro-Sonic Bridge thinking it was something from the space age and how I had to have one when I was older. These days I think it's a bit of a pain in the arse – but it works, and it's part of Gretsch history!

'The bamboo mist finish is more associated with the Gretsch Streamliner. I have one but in a fairly rare blonde finish, again from '55 with the bullet truss rod cover, Melita bridge, bound neck and "hump block" position markers. I don't play this one very often... I just sit and look at it.

'I use this exceptionally clean tobacco 'burst '65 Country Club in Hiway 51. The Filter'Tron pickups have a nice, clean, lively sound. A lot of people in the industry are aware of the fact that some Gretsches – though not all – lacked quality from around '64, after the Beatles played them on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. It would seem they were inundated with orders and just banged them out as fast as they could.

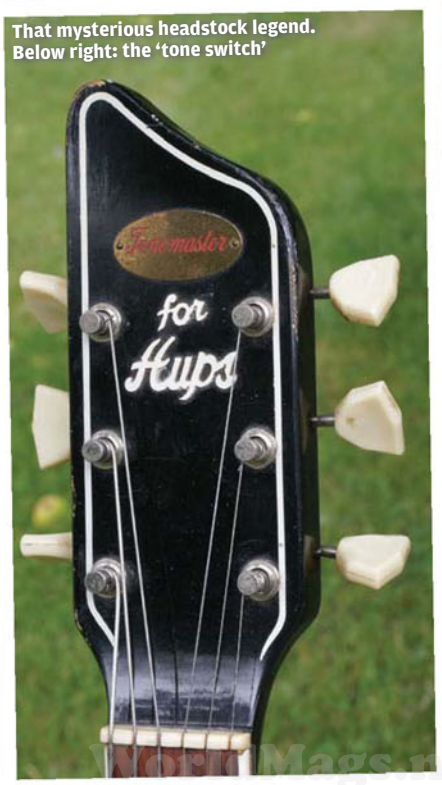
'I come across a lot of Gretsches these days that have been modified in some way or another. On some the results are not so good, while on others it seems to have improved them. This 630-1 Constellation was introduced to compete with the Gibson L-5. It started life as an acoustic, but someone has added a floating pickup, which looks like it grew there... and it sounds fantastic.'

All very lovely – but Phil's favourite is even better. 'This '57 Chet Atkins Country Gent is the best guitar I've ever played or owned, full stop. The plate on the headstock indicates that it's the sixth one out of a batch of 10 that they made with the wide neck that Chet Atkins wanted. This is a pain for me as I have relatively small hands, but the trade-off is a beautiful guitar built from that era.

'Chet had quite a lot to do with the design of this early version. He wanted a centre block in the body but they used the trestle bracing system, which everyone is glad about as it's now part of the Gretsch culture and sound. The Filter'Tron pickups were ↦

'I searched and finally found a '50s blues player nicknamed Hups, so maybe it was his guitar'

A Valco-made Tonemaster from '58, similar to a Supro Coronado



That mysterious headstock legend. Below right: the 'tone switch'

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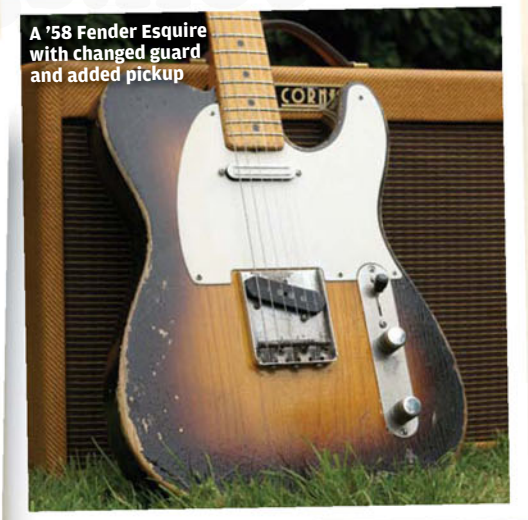
A 1947 Gibson ES-300 and a '66 Gibson ES-330TD

Black 1966 Mosrite and a Teisco K4L


A '58 Fender Esquire with changed guard and added pickup

introduced in this year to keep up with the Gibson humbucker which had just come out, although if you look closely there's no serial numbers or identifications, so these pickups are known the "Smooth'Trons". I adore this guitar, and it's my first choice for recording and live work.

'I do have a thing for the odd unexplained guitar. Here, for instance is a '58 Valco-made semi-acoustic, like a Supro, with "For Hups" written on the headstock. A lot of these guitars were sold during the '60s via the Sears Roebuck catalogue and Montgomery Ward department stores, and other companies also often put their own brands on the top, as with this "Tonemaster" badge.

'I searched everywhere and finally found a reference to a '50s blues player whose nickname was Hups, so I can only think this may have been his personal guitar. It's aged very nicely, and the high-output single coils – which look like humbuckers – sound really good. The pickup selector is marked "Tone Switch 1-2-3", and underneath it's the same as a Tele switch from the same era. The original case is a wonder, as well. I do get very excited about old cases – if only they could speak! I also hate an old guitar in the wrong case, no matter how nice it looks!

'One of the earliest guitars I own is this Gibson ES-300 from 1947, which is the same model that Franny Breecher used for the solo in Bill Haley's *Rock Around The Clock* in the mid-'50s. With a 17" wide maple body and again without a centre block, it's a big guitar and a fine example of an early electric guitar that has stood the test of time beautifully. It has plenty of unplugged volume for acoustic playing, but electrified, that P90 is just awesome. I added the Bigsby vibrato and had a longer vibrato arm built, so it's in a better position when strumming further up over the neck pickup area.

'Like the Guild Starfire III we saw earlier, this '66 Gibson ES-330 doesn't have centre block either. It's completely hollow, so the P90s are prone to feed back at high volumes through a big amp. This was a nightmare in the '60s when players were using a row of Marshall stacks without going through the PA, but today, with controlled overdrive, it can be really useful at a decent volume. There's an essence again of George Harrison for me here, as of course the 330 is so similar to the Epiphone Casinos the Beatles used.

'In my trade I get to see all guitar shapes and styles, and I must say I have a soft spot for the quirky side of things. On the drawing board Mosrite guitars just look all wrong, with everything offset and the wonderful meaty German carve around the body, but they're so comfortable to play!

'I have just the one, this '66 model in quite a rare factory black finish. It's got a monster sound, though, and with a very thin Ibanez-like neck this design was way ahead of his time... very futuristic. I found this one in the USA for a customer in the shop, but he didn't get on with it, so I thought "I'll have that!" and bought it back off him. I always say this to a customer, especially if it's one I've fallen in love with in the shop – it can be a tearful experience for me!

'Here's one with a quirk and a twist – this one will take you off to the moon. It's a late '60s Teisco Del Ray K4L in blue. The controls look like they came off an old oven, but you can get some really nice quirky sounds from the four pickups and all those switches and dials. If you take the backplate off, it's full of

'We get a lot of rock stars coming through the shop. It all seems quite surreal to me'

Hamiltone custom guitar, as used by SRV himself

A '63 Jazzmaster and a mid-late '60s Electric XII

cogs and gears and switches. It looks really nice when it's strapped on.'

Next, Phil produces a very luxurious bound solidbody Hamiltone with an inlaid fingerboard – as built for, and used by, Stevie Ray Vaughan, most notably in the video for *Couldn't Stand The Weather*. 'It's really heavy,' he admits. 'That's because of the all-maple construction and the through-neck design.

'It's obviously quite Strat-like in sound with those single coils, but there's more going on as well... it sounds a lot beefier, with excellent sustain. The fat neck, the high action and the long 26" scale don't really make this an easy player, but if you want to play like the man himself, you probably need to follow his guitar set-up specs.'

When it comes to real Fenders Phil's got a few more, and as you might imagine, they're fairly select. 'We get a lot of rock stars coming in the shop saying "Oh, yes, when I gigged with Keef " or "When I played with Jeff..." and it seems so surreal for me,' he laughs. 'But one of my favourite customers for a good chat is always Mick Ralphs from Bad Company.

'This '58 Fender Esquire used to belong to him. I changed the scratchplate to a telecaster-style and added the neck pickup, but I've kept all the original parts.

'I also have a '63 sunburst Jazzmaster. After all these years it has a few bumps and scrapes around the edges, but it's still a lovely example. It's no secret anymore, I suppose, that Jazzmasters are underrated... they are so good live and for recording too. True, they can be a pig to set up sometimes, but this one has perfect intonation and it's a fantastic-sounding guitar. I also like the body shape.

'With the same body again, here's an immaculate Fender Electric XII in pristine condition. Some say this was, and still is, the best electric 12-string ever built, and for good reason. It just stays in tune however hard you play it... and what a sound.

'The white Jazzmaster with the maple neck, the gold anodised scratchplate and the Bigsby vibrato is a Custom Shop guitar built for the NAMM show in 1997 – it's got that stamped on the back of the headstock. Instead of Jazzmaster pickups, it's got three Strat pickups. It's a one-off, a kind of amalgam of various features that was never intended for full production.

Italia replica with custom paint by Inky Hollow

'Quite a while ago before I opened the shop I was thinking what to have in the window, and I saw this Indie custom with the Red Arrows theme on the front, painted by Tom Shepherd at Inky Hollow. I think this still looks amazing – that's the reason why I never sold it. It's called the Indie BOB guitar, from the Best Of British series.'

Two Reverends: a Rick Vito and a Flat Rock 15th Anniversary

From old and unusual guitars, Phil produces a pair of bang up to date guitars. 'Well, there's some great modern stuff out there – Reverend, for example. I think they do a fine job with looks that capture the classic feel,' he explains. 'I have two: a black Rick Vito model which has a Supro type single coil at the bridge in a humbucker case, plus a P90 at the neck. It's got a big, chimey sound. The other one is a Flat Rock 15th Anniversary with a flamed maple top and a trans-orange finish with hardware that evokes Gretsch and Fender.

'I have two basses that I keep here all the time, just for recording work, really. One is a fiesta red Precision that I sent to a guy in the USA to have refinished as it had already been stripped back. It's a little unusual with the green scratchplate. And the '78 fretless Precision with the Antigua finish is a wonderful thing. Both are fitted with flatwound strings for that authentic old-style thud, as are all my guitars. Do they make any other kind of strings?

'As I said at the beginning, you may think I'm in a wonderful position surrounded by so many guitars. On a Monday I might have what I believe to be the holy grail and buy it, then something better comes in on the Wednesday. This is not good for my financial situation or for the space in my house, because I just don't want to sell any of them. I must be the world's worst guitar shop owner. I can't hide my excitement, I love my job, but I fear going to work tomorrow!'

A one-off from 1997: a Fender Custom Shop NAMM guitar

A refin pre-CBS Precision and an Antigua finish '78 fretless Precision

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FUTURE PROOF VINTAGE GUITARS PT II

In the second instalment of his search for instruments which will withstand the fickle finger of fashion, **Sid Bishop** checks out the world of jazz guitars and flat-top acoustics as well as that perhaps most over-subscribed of collectibles, the Fender Stratocaster

Last month we kicked off our new series looking at vintage guitars that might not damage your bank balance long-term, as well as being fabulous instruments to have around in the first place. We began with some familiar, solid-gold classics, the Fender Telecaster, the Gibson ES-335, and various Rickenbacker semi-acoustics. This month we're going to be throwing the net a little wider by investigating the world of jazz guitars, followed by the legendary Fender Stratocaster, and then conclude with flat-top acoustics.

The term 'jazz guitar' encompasses a large family of acoustic archtop f-hole cello-style instruments, many of which are modified by the addition of pickups, often installed in suspended form to avoid impeding the resonance of the guitar's top (table). They are not played merely by jazz guitarists – they are also much favoured by rock'n'roll or rockabilly players who like a woody, retro tone. Some blues players might use them too, though being hollowbodied they don't behave themselves very well on stage at the sort of volumes normal nowadays.

A bit of a niche market? Yes, maybe... but they are lovely things to possess, and the finest examples represent the epitome of the luthier's art: witness the newest version of the Gibson Citation, which has a US list price just over $33,000. Certainly worth gathering together a few, but don't necessarily expect quick returns or vast profits.

The fundamental archtop jazz guitar design dates from 1924 and is credited to Gibson sound engineer Lloyd Loar, whose design for this punchier-sounding cello-bodied guitar evolved from his earlier mandolin designs. His name still survives on a range of instruments currently produced in the Far East.

In 1924 the invention of a practical electro-magnetic pickup was still several years in the future, and the very earliest production electric 'Spanish' guitars wouldn't appear until the mid 1930s. Early archtop instruments were purely acoustic, though many had pickups added at a later date. Providing this had been done with care, without drilling any holes, this would not affect their current value.

We are already well acquainted with many legendary Gibson jazz guitars such as the L4, L-5, L-7, Super 400, Johnny Smith, Switchmaster, Tal Farlow and Barney Kessell, plus the later Herb Ellis or Howard Roberts

Jazz guitars may be a bit of a niche market but they are lovely things to possess, and the finest represent the epitome of the luthier's art

Left: acoustic archtops like this '47 Gibson L-7 are great value. Centre: the wraparound pickup on this '48 Rickenbacker limits player appeal. Right: a '50s Gibson L-5 with Alnico pickups

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A '58 Gretsch Anniversary, a Guild Duane Eddy, and a '47 Epiphone Emperor. Bottom right: Hofners always have a keen cult following in Europe

Cello-bodied electrics and acoustics by Gretsch, Guild or Epiphone are well worth acquiring and have a chance of increasing in value

Fusion, all varying in dimensions, woods, pickup options and degrees of cosmetic enhancement. Gibson has for decades been regarded as the market leader in this particular field, although it should be noted that there were dozens of other guitar makers in the US, especially before WWII, and several survive to modern times. Epiphone, Gretsch, D'Angelico, D'Aquisto and Guild all made fine quality instruments, along with lesser-known brands like Stromberg, later purchased by Kay. Some of these will fetch serious money. There were others built to a 'budget' price, such as the aforementioned Kay brand, or Michigan, Vega, Stella, Harmony, Gibson's own Kalamazoo, and Silvertones made by Harmony for the Sears-Roebuck mail-order company. Budget models generally have a pressed laminated top, whereas more expensive guitars have a hand carved top, and there is a noticeable difference in tonal quality and volume. Even Fender had a crack at the jazz market back in the '70s with their Montego and LTD models; these were not a great success, unfortunately, and quickly vanished from the catalogue. I will cover these particular instruments in more detail in a future article on all Fender's semi-acoustics.

Look out for Guilds – the CE100D, Duane Eddy, Stuart, Savoy, Manhattan, and the gorgeous Artist Award. Epiphones are also well worth acquiring, both pre- and post- Gibson buy-out, and models such as the Howard Roberts (with its distinctive oval soundhole), Broadway, Emperor and Regent are all fine guitars, and mostly pretty scarce too. There are also a wide range of Gretsch cello-bodied acoustics and electrics around. Don't pass one of those by. Not only are they just great instruments, they have a chance of steadily increasing in value. Bear in mind, though, that most current Guilds (and their DeArmond cousins), Epiphones and Gretsches are imported from China or Korea. Nothing wrong with them at all, but always try to locate American-made guitars if collecting primarily for investment.

During the immediate post-war years few, if any, American guitars were imported into the UK, as there remained in place a trade embargo on US-made goods, not finally lifted until mid-1959. Fortunately for guitarists of the day there were plenty of European-made instruments available, principally from Sweden, Holland, Italy and Czechoslovakia, and also most notably Germany, once production resumed following the war. From this country we had Clifford Essex, Paragon or Emile Grimshaw's guitars, and if none of these proved satisfactory we could go to a custom builder like the late Dick Knight.

Throughout the '60s Japanese brands began to invade the UK market, and quantities were to increase dramatically during the '70s. There were, and still are, jazz-style guitars from Antoria, Aria, Washburn, Yamaha, Ibanez, Peerless, and Farida amongst others, though most are made in South Korea or China these days. They're great value, and buy them if you like them, but while at the end of the day they are undeniably decent guitars for the money, it's best to forget any investment potential.

Let's move on now to the Fender Stratocaster. The Stratocaster is the biggest-selling electric guitar in history despite its intrinsic flaws, of which there are quite a few. I'm pretty confident that there is hardly a guitar player alive who hasn't owned one at some point in his or her career. Consequently they will always readily trade for decent money regardless of age, or even of condition (up to a point).

I don't really want to get too bogged down in this article relating dozens and dozens of specific facts about the entire history of this guitar. There's not enough room and there are already stacks of thoroughly researched and informative books on the subject. Get hold of one or ↦

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Famous names: David Gilmour's '54 Strat, the renowned restored Hank Marvin Strat, and Eric Clapton's Blackie mongrel – a classic example of a neck/body change

Can you tell if a Fender is 100 per cent original? You can't. Nobody can. But if the components are from the right period, does it actually matter?

two; you need to know what you're buying. Because the Stratocaster is so familiar to us all, there's not really much I need to add here, other than to briefly remind you that it arrived in 1954 and was Leo Fender's attempt to overcome the tonal limitations of his existing Telecaster and Esquire. It would also serve to expand his catalogue with a more contemporary – at the time quite futuristic-looking – design, and fight back against market competition caused by the introduction of Gibson's Les Paul.

In 1965 Leo sold his company to CBS, in whose hands it resided until 1985. You will have heard a great deal, I'm sure, about 'pre-CBS' Strats. They are much sought after, and you will not therefore be surprised to learn that they fetch very high prices. A certain amount of this is hype, really, as there is no discernible difference between those made just prior to 1965 and those just after, especially as those made following the CBS buyout continued to utilise the stock of parts made before. Still, for whatever reason, logical or not, adding any pre-1965 examples to your collection will cost significant sums.

Any 'custom' colour attracted an additional charge. Less people therefore purchased custom finishes, and as a consequence they are now rarer and more valuable. There are a large number of custom colours, and there was a period when you could order one in any colour that happened to be available in the then current DuPont custom-car paint range.

Over decades there have been a great variety of Stratocasters. We have seen Road Worns, Modern Players, Highway Ones, American Standards, American Specials, American Deluxes, Blacktops, Vintage Hot Rods and Custom Shop issues in everything from NOS to Closet Classic to Heavy Relic finishes; there are '50s reissues, '60s reissues, '70s reissues, four-point neck plates, three-point neck plates with micro-tilt, roller nuts, models equipped with humbuckers, Floyd Rose trems or no trems at all, and sporadic special runs, all available in bewildering permutations of finish and neck options. There are also many 'artist endorsed' or 'signature' models, and even a Strat 12-string. You'll need to keep track of all this stuff, and you should obtain a comprehensive guide to serial numbers at some stage. Buying recent Strats shouldn't present too many problems, and by recent I mean 1980s and later, but you must get wise to Chinese knock-offs, the best of which can actually be quite difficult to detect to all but an expert, either put together from parts or manufactured as complete guitars.

So you've arrived at this guy's house in response to an ad in the local paper or on the internet, and you find yourself faced with a very tasty-looking late 1960s maple neck Strat in daphne blue. The price appears sensible, it's in good shape, and you want it. How can you tell if it's 100 per cent original? Unless he has the original sales receipt, you can't. Nobody can. It was common practice in the '70s and '80s for shops (certainly the ones I worked in) to swap around necks and bodies. If they had a pile of Strats in stock they might feel that a maple neck looked better on that fiesta red body, and that scruffy neck might be better married to an already badly marked black body, and that neck passed on in turn to that old sunburst in the corner. That sort of thing went on constantly, and I read with interest in Eric Clapton's recent book that he regularly did precisely the same thing. Many years later it is totally impossible to establish whether a particular body was originally made with a particular neck... or even the pickups, come to that. There are thousands of such mongrels around – even Clapton's legendary 'Blackie' was one – and the downside of vintage Fender guitars is that they're so easy to take apart. I can totally disassemble a Strat down to every last screw in about 15 minutes; so can lots of other people. It takes a similar amount of time to shuffle a bunch of parts around and make a 'new' one. If there's no original receipt then go ahead and buy if you want, or you can walk away. A very serious collector might well do the latter. Your choice. I would, however, make the point that as long as all the components are from the right period, does it actually matter?

As the focus of most articles regarding guitar collecting seem to be about electrics, I think a look at acoustics is probably long overdue, so here we go. Electric guitars have only been with us since the mid-1930s. Acoustics have been around for a whole lot longer than that, well back into the 19th century at least, but as especially antique examples rightfully belong in museums, you are unlikely to encounter any. It's also worth

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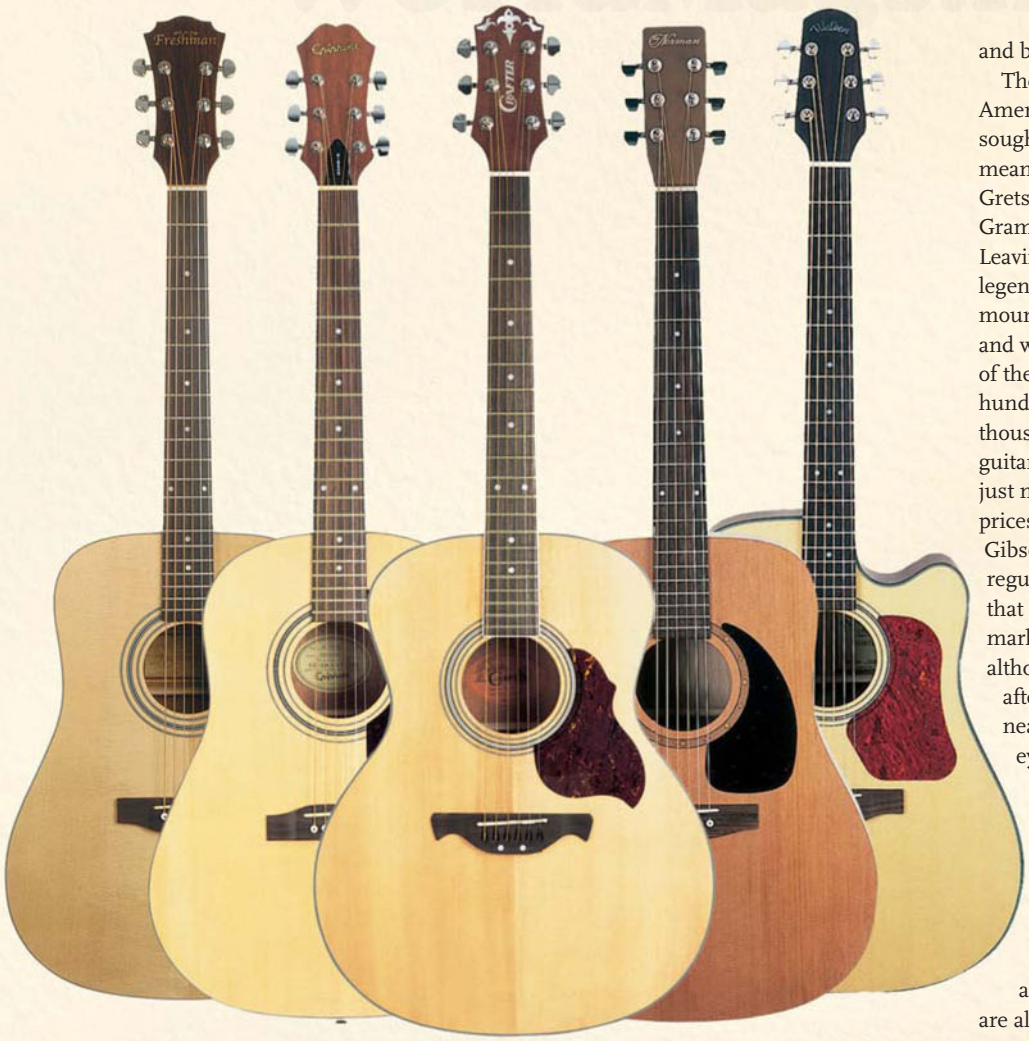

The better factories in China and South Korea are making decent instruments, but I can't forsee them having the cachet of a US-made one

remembering that prior to the invention of steel strings around 1900, all guitars had only gut strings.

Most of the 'collectable' acoustics that we would now expect to come across most frequently will date back to the '50s or '60s, although a scarcer pre-war guitar might cross our paths from time to time. The oldest guitar that I personally have ever been offered was a 1916 Martin, though I've bought and sold some mandolins and banjos older than that.

The world of the acoustic guitar is such a wide-ranging one that you may decide to collect those from a specific period, one brand perhaps, but you might plan to purchase purely with investment and long-term profit in mind. I would always take the view that to reduce these beautiful old instruments to a mere couple of lines on an investment portfolio would be close to criminal: they should be played, heard, and enjoyed, not just locked away in the dark. Nonetheless I am also mindful of the unavoidable paradox that a fine quality vintage guitar will in time become so rare that you can't actually take it out and play it anyway. The danger of loss, accidental damage, or everyday wear and tear is simply too great. I personally know many players who possess rare instruments but won't dare take them outside the house.

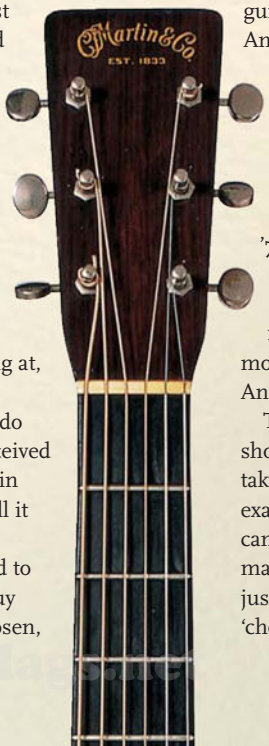
As fellow *G&B* columnist Phil Harris once pointed out, they get so valuable, you can't enjoy them anymore.

Putting aside the 'making pots of money' aspect of collecting, you could define a sensible budget for yourself, then collect what you enjoy possessing, looking at, and playing, but keep in mind that anything you do buy needs to have a perceived and intrinsic value, just in case you may want to sell it on, or even trade it for something else. We need to be sensible here: only buy quality items, wisely chosen, and bought at a fair price.

The dynamics of today's market means that American-made acoustic guitars are the most sought-after and hence most saleable. This means Gibson and Martin, then Guild, Gretsch, Rickenbacker, Mossman, Harptone, Grammer, Epiphone, Harmony and others. Leaving aside guitars made by some legendary old guy up in the Appalachian mountains who only makes two guitars a year and wants $60,000 for each of them, many of the rest can be found for prices in the hundreds of pounds rather than many thousands, and I'm confident that certain guitars made by many of the makers I have just mentioned can be found at 'affordable' prices. Secondhand, though non-vintage Gibsons, Martins, and Guilds all turn up regularly, and at realistic sums. The hysteria that seems to have infected the electric guitar market hasn't quite extended to acoustics, although some brands have been sought-after since the early '60s. I recently saw a near-perfect 1940 Martin D45 for an eye-watering $165,000!

Not all guitars you might want to buy have to be American and there are many European manufacturers. German Hoyers and Hofners, Finnish Landolas, Swedish Levins and Italian Ekos are some that come to mind. Australian Matons are of a good quality, and do crop up from time to time. They are all useable guitars, and it's rewarding to accrue a few.

The 'better' factories in China and South Korea are currently making decent instruments, and quality continues to improve. Of course as the quality increases, so does the price, but it is possible to buy a very good Far Eastern acoustic for well under £1000, and I've tried some superb guitars for as little as £300. Whether they are 'collectable' in the long term remains to be seen, but personally I really can't forsee any Far-Eastern guitar ever having the cachet of an old American one, no more than a Japanese handmade violin will ever have the same appeal as an Italian example, despite how good it may actually be. If they work well, and you like playing them, that shouldn't really matter. Having said all of that, some Japanese made guitars from the '60s and '70s are starting to create interest in the collectors market, and I've recently spotted several first-generation Yamahas fetching quite surprising amounts of money, not to mention certain models by Antoria, Ibanez and various others.



There's something for every pocket, and it shouldn't be hard to build up a collection to take pride in. Sure, you can buy plum examples of legendary US-made guitars if you can afford it, but the lower reaches of the market should not be ignored or dismissed just because they happen to be seen as 'cheap'. Just enjoy them.

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Arpeggio Armoury

Step right this way for more practical ear training to help improve your musical senses.

The last two *Drills For Thrills* have been concerned with ear-training, specifically regarding scales. In the last of this three-part series of exercises, we're going to focus on arpeggios.

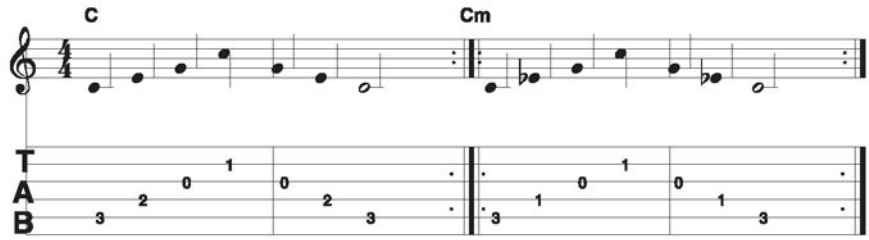
Arpeggios are formed from scales. For example, to make a C major arpeggio, you take the 1st (root), 3rd and 5th notes of the scale and then add the 8th (octave) at the top to make the arpeggio a complete octave.

Since the C major scale consists of C D E F G A B C (see Exercise 1 in Sep 13 issue for a suggested fingering of the C major scale), if we take the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 8th, we get C, E, G, and C again (this arrangement of notes appears in the first two bars of Exercise 1).

To convert a major arpeggio into a minor one, the third is flattened. In this case, the third is E; if we flatten this note we move it down by one fret, obtaining Eb. So, a C minor arpeggio consists of the notes C, Eb, G, and C again to complete the octave; this arrangement of notes can be seen in bars three and four of Exercise 1. Exercise 1 is based on C major and C minor arpeggios. The second and third exercises are both based on a specific type of arpeggio called a triad. As the name suggests ("tri" = three), a triad denotes an arpeggio that incorporates three notes: 1st, 3rd and 5th.

1 C MAJOR AND C MINOR ARPEGGIOS — 4/4 TIME

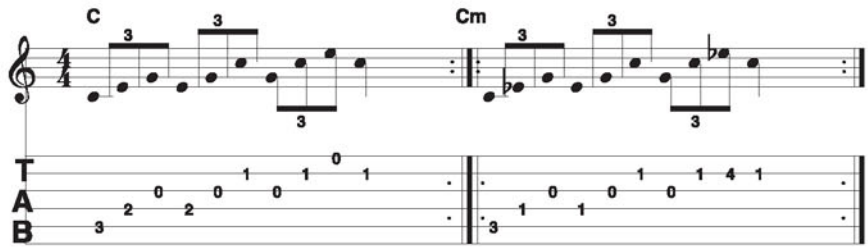
Treat this exercise as two separate ear tests. First, play the C major arpeggio as shown in the first two bars over and over to get used to the sound of it. Now, sing along to the exercise. Don't worry: the quality of your voice is immaterial, but do try to sustain a clear, distinct note with the minimum of wavering. Once you are comfortable with this, play only the first note – that is, C on the fifth string, third fret – and sing the rest of the exercise, repeating the low C at the end of the exercise



to check that you haven't wavered off-key. Now go through and repeat the entire same procedure for the C minor arpeggio in bars three and four.

2 C MAJOR TRIAD INVERSIONS — 4/4 TIME

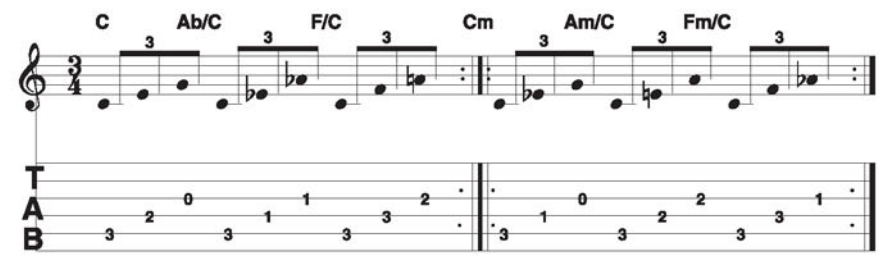
The first bar of this exercise uses inversions of the C major triad. The first triplet beat – a triplet being three notes played in the space of one beat – consists of the 1st (root), 3rd and 5th, which is a root position C major triad. The second beat – in ascending order – is made up from the 3rd, 5th and 8th (also the root note, just an octave higher), which is a first inversion C major triad. The third triplet beat consists of the 5th, 8th, and then the 3rd an octave higher, which is a second inversion triad. On the fourth beat the exercise returns to the key note an



octave higher than at the start of the exercise. Just as in Exercise 1, play the exercise through, then sing the notes as you play them. After that, play only the first note and sing the exercise. The second bar is the same exercise, but with C minor triads.

3 C CHROMATIC SCALE, RANDOM PATTERN — 3/4 TIME

A bit of an ear twister, this one. Like Exercise 2 it's based on triads, but instead of proceeding up a series of triads in the same key, this treats the low C as the lowest note in each triad. So, first of all we have the C major root position triad of C, E and G. Then, we treat this low C as the lowest note in a first inversion triad – a first inversion Ab triad. Then, we treat the low C as the lowest note in a second inversion triad, a second inversion F triad. Be warned, however, that this requires some mental/aural



gymnastics to get right, and assumes you are totally confident and accurate with Exercise 2. The second bar is basically the same, but with the three different kinds of minor triad.

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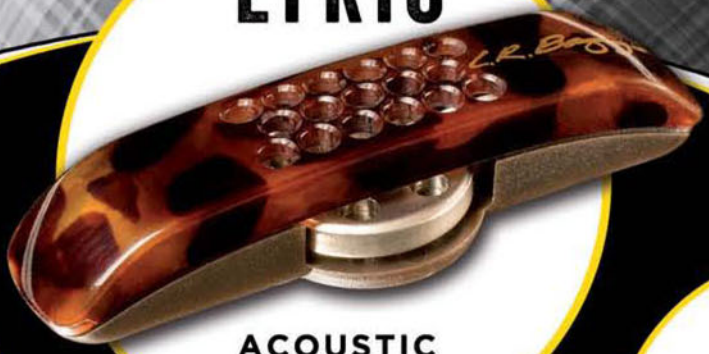

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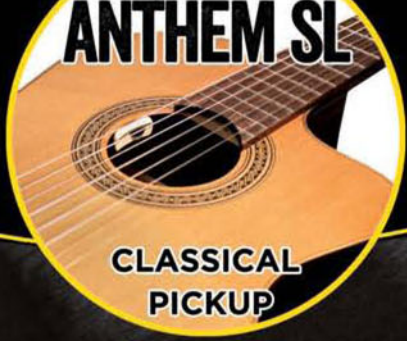

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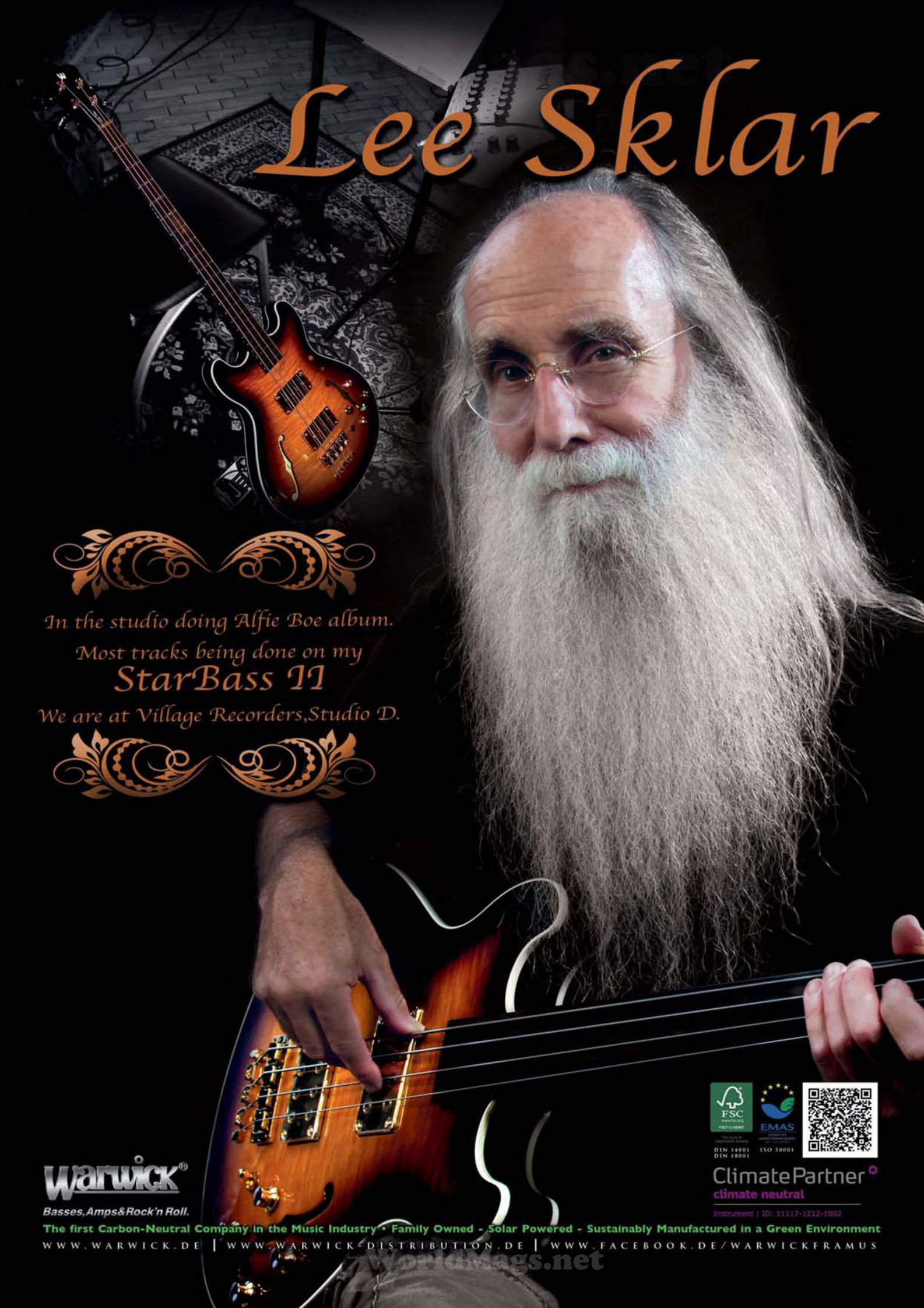

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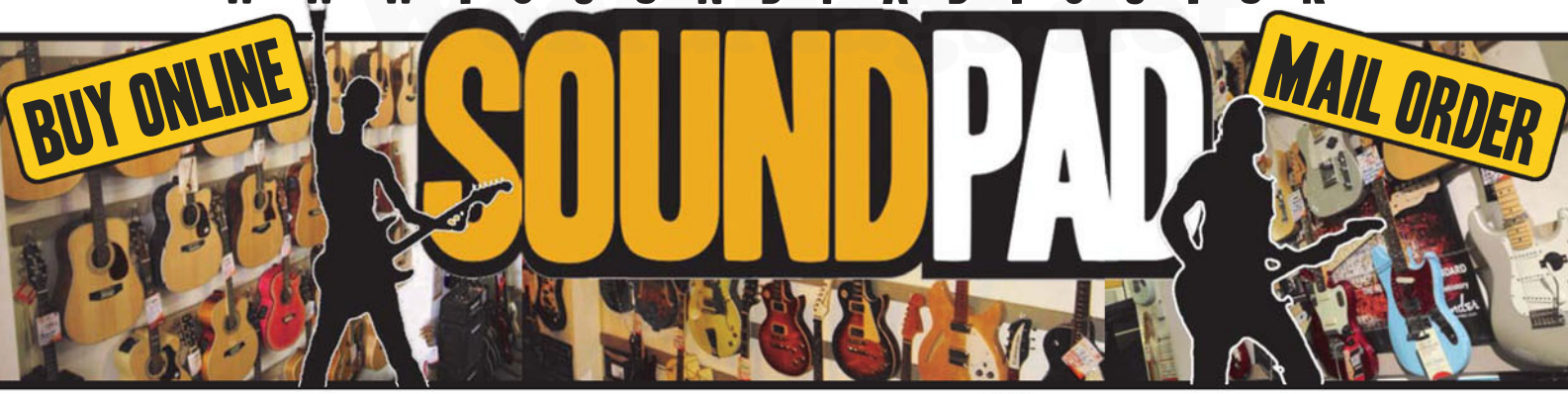

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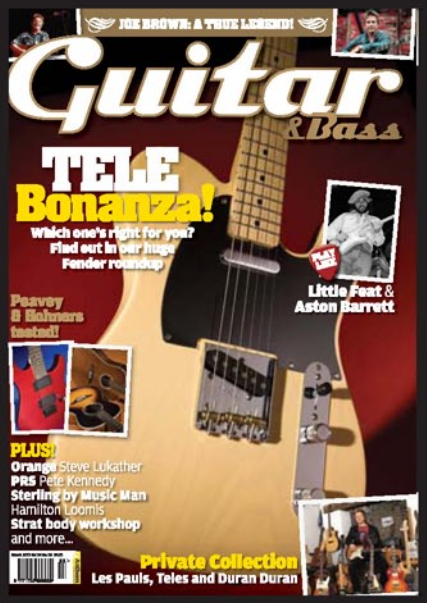

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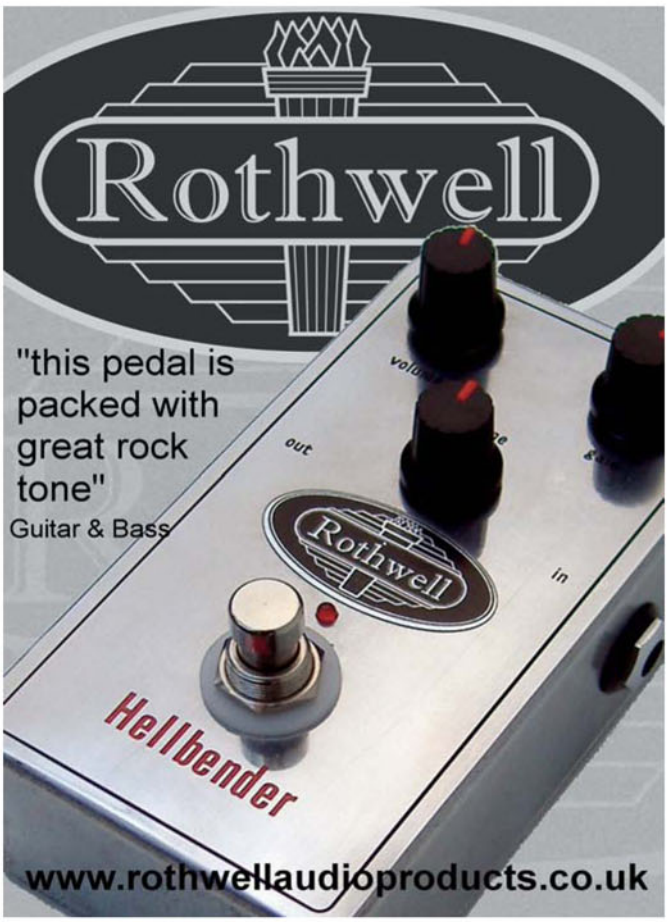

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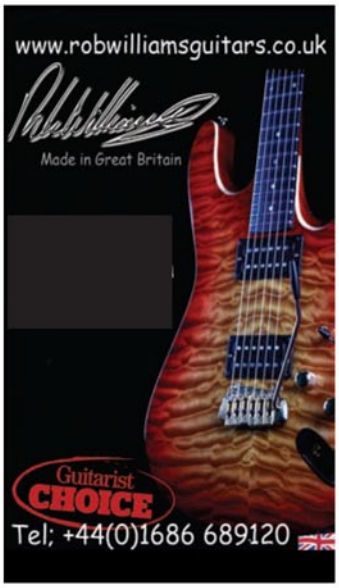

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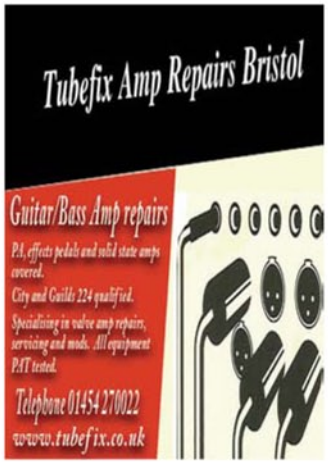

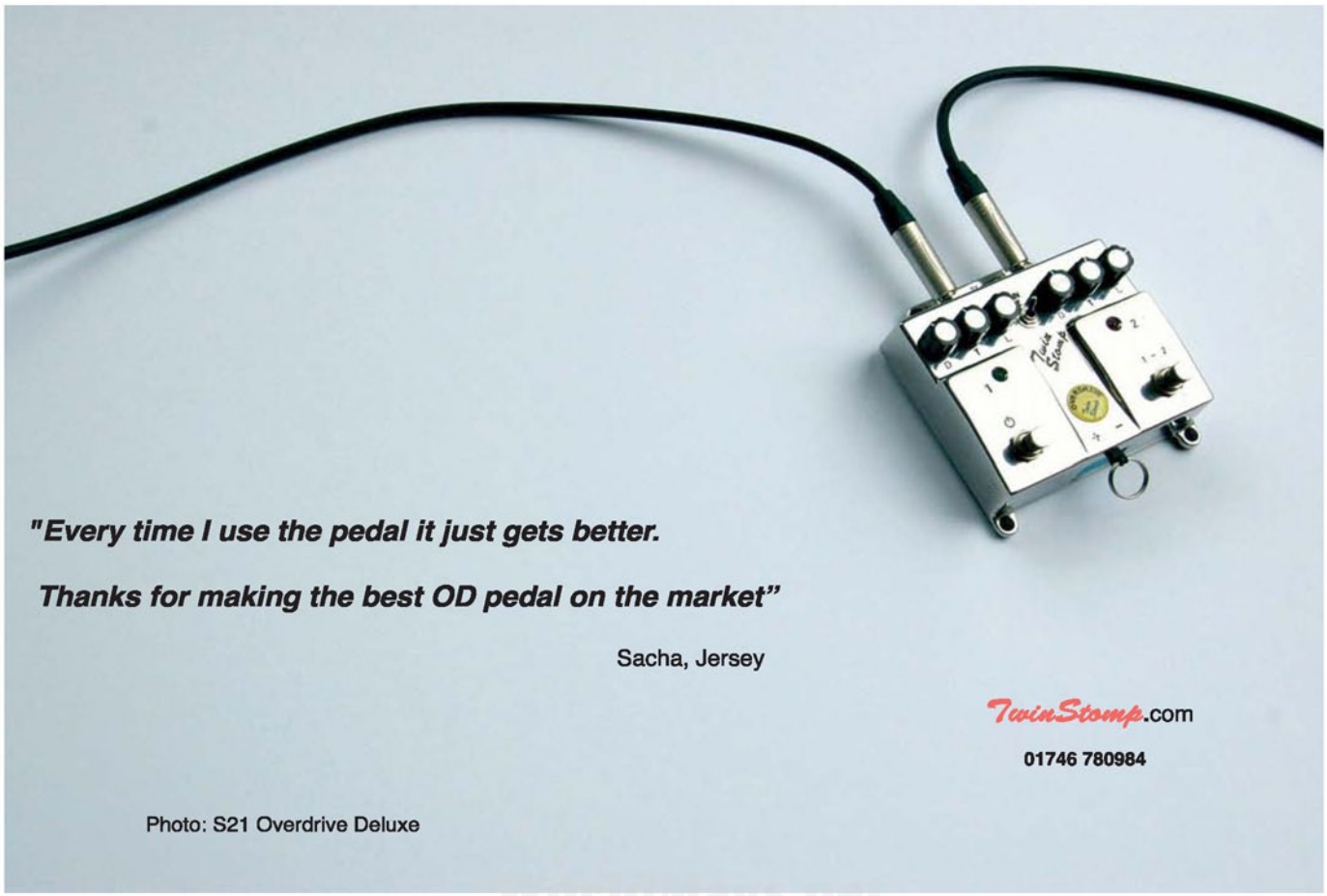

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Pickguard with integral pickup for 1960s Rosetti or Egmond Lucky Seven, any condition. Tel: John 07977 203234 or 01706 377174, Lancs

Flip leg rest for headless bass/guitar, cash waiting. Tel/txt: 07535890480, or email funkycat1@hotmail.co.uk.

Gibson Howard Roberts oval hole guitar, top cash for right guitar. Tel George, 01566 775617, Cornwall

Mesa/Boogie Express 5:25 or 5:50 1x12" combo or Egnater Rebel 30, must be vgc, cash waiting, preferably London area. Tel: Mick 020 8530 1208

Fender Tweed '50s Champ or Princeton or Deluxe amp, must be original. Tel: 0151 638 9567, Cheshire area

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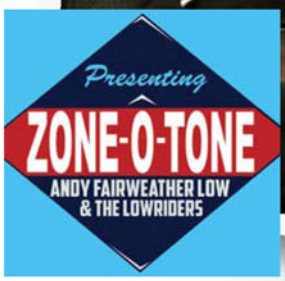
Soundtrack of my life

Andy Fairweather Low

Like the man himself, this selection of must-have records displays consummate cool and classic taste

Photo: Judy Totten



Andy Fairweather Low came to prominence in the late '60s as vocalist and guitarist with Amen Corner, topping the charts with *(If Paradise Was) Half As Nice*. His solo career spawned the monster hit *Wide Eyed And Legless* but by the late '70s he found himself increasingly in demand as a sideman, most notably with Eric Clapton, the Who and Roger Waters. Although he currently retains fretboard duty with Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings he still squeezes in the occasional solo LP; the latest, *Zone-O-Tone*, is a real corker, drawing inspiration from Atlantic soul, Johnny Kidd, the Shadows and other '60s hit-makers for a set of new songs that shine as brightly as his any in his glittering back catalogue.

The Rolling Stones

THE ROLLING STONES

I saw the Stones in February '64 and I'm a fan of their covers from that period – *Carol, I'm A King Bee* and *Route 66* (we play this with The Rhythm Kings and I play Keith's original solo note for note). Most bands get better and tighter; the Stones are as loose now as they were then. Loose to the point of perfection... not easy!

George Harrison

LIVING IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

Nobody writes songs like George did. There is something about the atmosphere on this album – you can hear the joy in the room. I am sure that the fact I knew *Give Me Love* so well helped me when I auditioned for George. I joined in, added vocal harmony, and sang the slide guitar solo. Fabulous man, fabulous album.

Otis Redding

DICTIONARY OF SOUL

I got an autograph from Otis when he played Bristol in '65. It said 'Respect from Otis.' Wow! We used to play *Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa (Sad Song)* in Amen Corner. Booker T & The MGs, like the Band and the Funk Brothers, wrote the book on how to construct a rhythm section and a horn section. Masterful, soulful, forever.

Taj Mahal

THE REAL THING

This still has the same effect on me every time I play it. That horn section! I keep trying to put a section together to emulate it. One day I'll get it right! The energy on *Sweet Mama Janisse*, I defy anyone not to tap their foot... plus this is a live album. Taj is driving this beast. The blues, yeah – but taken up a notch.

The Band

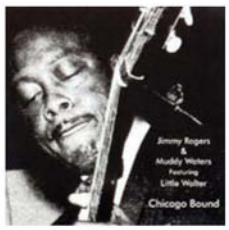
THE BAND

What musicians, what singers and what writers – what an album! This record was never off the turntable in 1971. It was the right combination of people at the right time. They developed a whole musical style that became their own, and along with the Beatles, Little Feat and Neil Young, they set the bar very high.

Jimmy Rogers

CHICAGO BOUND

I joined Eric's band in '91, not long after he gave me a copy of this. 'Listen to that,' he said, 'it's a perfect album.' The players on this create a magical moment in time. I've learned so much from this one record. There is one moment – If you get it, it's magic. It's about ability, destiny, luck... whatever it is it's here.



Ry Cooder

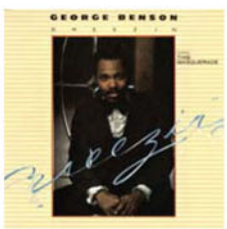
JAZZ

I've loved every record he's ever made. There's so much more to his music and musicianship than what you hear – a musical iceberg, no less. This is an album made by a master musician. Ry shakes the hands of Bix Beiderbecke, Joseph Spence, Jelly Roll Morton, Bert Williams... it's nothing short of a masterpiece.

George Benson

BREEZIN'

I was daft enough to buy a George Benson instructional DVD. He's in that special class of musician along with Montgomery, Pass and Burrell – delicious guitar players. There is so much melody in all the playing. I feel inspired and intimidated when I listen to this. Benson took the torch and carries it on to this day.



Derek & The Dominos

LAYLA & OTHER ASSORTED LOVE SONGS

From the first track you hear a bunch of people creating something joyful on a wing and a prayer. Not many double albums get full coverage; this one did... *I Looked Away, Bell Bottom,* and my favourite, *It's Too Late*. You get together, you like each other, you have fun, you play, you make history. That's what they did.

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